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A STORY OF LOST OPPORTUNITY: THE APOLOGY TO DEACONESSES DISJOINED BY THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

By

Caryn Douglas

A Project-Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of St. Stephen's College
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Academic Senate of St. Stephen's College for acceptance, a Project-Dissertation entitled, *Pilgrimage to Hope*, submitted by Full Name of Student in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry.

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ABSTRACT

This project tells the story of the removal of United Church of Canada Deaconesses from ministry when they married and examines the apology given to these women by the United Church in 2006. The act of removal, called disjoining, was officially ended in 1960 but the practice and its negative effects continued for several decades. The study explores the development of the biblical and theological history limiting women's vocational choices. It traces the enactment of disjoining in the Deaconess Order with an emphasis on the period of the 1950s and 60s as the rule disappears. Remembrances and reflections of women who were disjoined during this period enflesh the archival records. They tell stories of lost opportunity. A theological framework of eight stages is applied to assess the success of the apology in attaining the goal of a true conversion of heart. The apology is also a story of lost opportunity. The church's confession of its sexist policies and practices is oriented to the past, without thorough truth telling. There is no application of the insights from the disjoining practice to continuing patterns of gender based discrimination. Recommendations for the United Church to further the commitments made in the apology conclude the project.

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Chapter 1

A SHORT STORY OF DISJOINING

> *Once upon a time there were deaconesses in the United Church of Canada. When these deaconesses got married they were tossed out of the deaconess order in an action called disjoining. One day not too long ago, but a long time after the practice had stopped, the United Church apologized for what it had done to these women.*

This is a story. "The truth about stories is that is all we are. You don't have anything if you don't have stories."[1]

This story wants to be told. I want to tell this story. The story tells of sexism and misogyny, of social control and economic compliance, of end and rupture. It is a story of theological proportion: of vocation, and call, and forgiveness and repentance. It is also a story of hope and perseverance, a story of vision and desire, a story of challenge and change.

The story tells of lost opportunity. Historically disjoining meant lost opportunities for the women: lost ministry and service, lost recognition and status, lost salary and pensions. Disjoining meant lost opportunities for the church: lost strength in the diaconate, lost leadership for mission, lost witness for the liberation of women. But the loss does not all lay in the past. The apology to deaconesses[2] disjoined by the United Church of Canada has been a lost

[1] Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories: a native narrative* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2003), 2.

[2] The apology was to disjoined deaconesses and ordained women affected by a marriage bar, but this study does not look at the experience of ordained women. The understanding of ordination was theologically different from designation as a deaconess and the rules governing the ordained differed as well. There were only 27 women ordained in the United Church between 1936 and 1957, when Elinor Leard became the first married woman to be ordained.

opportunity: for the truth to be told, for recognition of past wrongs, for addressing today's issues of sexism and discrimination.

In telling stories, timing is everything. Now is the time to tell this story.

In the process of preparing for this telling, I took a class on feminist research methodology at a university.[3] Combined as a graduate/undergraduate course, most of the students were women undergrads in their early twenties. Early in the course I shared the topic of my research: women removed from ministry because they got married. The response from my co-students was a polite, "Oh, umm, interesting." I credited my middle agedness for their lack of interest. Only later in the year, as we revisited each project in more depth, I realized my error. The idea that women could not continue in the work force *just* because they got married was so far removed from the experience of these young women that it simply did not sink in that first time of hearing. Like a TV commercial for the latest diet drink, they had to hear about it several times to grasp its message. "You mean" one of them finally exclaimed, "that women were not ALLOWED to work!" "Yep," I said, and I went on to explain, "at least not allowed to work for money, and it happened not only to women in the church, it was common throughout the professions dominated by women: teachers, bank tellers, librarians, nurses. And it was still happening in my life time." Even as Women's Studies majors, most had never heard of marriage bars and the level of discrimination enacted against women as recently as the 1960s. I felt a surge of

[3] Feminist Approaches to Research, Course Number 156358, Women's Studies Department, University of Manitoba, 2005-2006.

call rise within me. I want to make the marriage bar story known. We as women have made significant gains in social, political, and theological arenas. I do not want this story to be lost to the present generation.

At a meeting in 2006, the Executive of the General Council, the national governing body of the United Church, apologized to the former deaconesses. Two years later, at a subsequent meeting of the Executive I had reason to remind the court of the apology.[4] People gave a mixed response to my address, but most notably to me, many members of the Executive demonstrated complete ignorance of the apology. With the rotating turnover of Executive members, many people in the room knew nothing about deaconesses losing their jobs nor the action of apology. As I addressed the Executive, I felt frustrated and I had to repress the less than polite thought bubble in my head that was about to slip out my mouth! This apology means nothing if the group who gave it on behalf of the church[5] exhibit complete ignorance about it within a handful of years. My conviction to tell the story of this chapter in the United Church's history was enlivened in that moment. More than enlivened, my passion was set aflame. This is an opportunity I do not want to miss.

Gayle Letherby points out that "studying women is not new, yet studying them from the perspective of their own experiences so that women can understand themselves in their social world has virtually no history at all. The first

[4] In 2007 I became a member of the General Council Executive. I was present as a guest for the apology in 2006 but was not a member at that time.

[5] Unless otherwise nuanced church refers to The United Church of Canada.

step then is to make women's lives visible."[6] In this paper I record some of the stories of these women and what they experienced when they were removed from ministry. To date research on the life and work of United Church deaconesses has been limited.[7] I want to make a contribution to making the story of these women's lives more accessible.

Some Historical Background

The United Church of Canada's Deaconess Order came into being in 1926, the year after the United Church was formed. Originating in the 1890s, in the Methodist and Presbyterian churches, the Deaconess Order provided a venue for women to get a theological education and training to carry out a variety of social and educational ministries: in congregations, with a focus on education and church expansion; in domestic or foreign missions, teaching or nursing; and, in programming with youth and children. The women did amazing and important work that helped to shape Canada's commitment to providing universal social support and education. Their contribution wove a richness into the fabric of the United Church.

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[6] Gayle Letherby, *Feminist Research in Theory and Practice* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003), 73.

[7] Notable exceptions are: Mary Anne MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens: Deaconesses in The United Church of Canada, 1925 to 1964," (MA thesis, University of Toronto, 1987); Sherri-Lynne McConnell, "Canadian Deaconess and Missionary Education for Women - Training to Live the Social Gospel: The Methodist National Training School and The Presbyterian Deaconess and Missionary Training Home, 1893 – 1926," (MA thesis, University of Winnipeg, 2003); Kathleen Heuer, "Calling or Co-optation?: Revisioning Ministry in The United Church of Canada," (DMin diss., St. Stephen's College, Edmonton, 1999); Committee on Diaconal Ministry, *History of Diaconal Ministry in The United Church of Canada 1925 – 1991*, (Toronto: Division of Ministry Personnel and Education, United Church of Canada, 1991); Gwyn Griffith, *Weaving a Changing Tapestry*, (Winnipeg: Centre for Christian Studies, Forthcoming 2009); Mary Rose Donnelly and Heather Dau, *Katharine* (Winfield, BC: Wood Lake Books, 1992).

But the Deaconess Order was only open to single women. Members of the order who married were “disjoined” from it and thereby forced to resign from employment and membership. The indignity was symbolized by the passing back of the deaconess pin that had been presented at the time of designation. Disjoining, a violent word, conveys the severity of the rupture for women who experienced it. Hundreds of women were affected by this rule, not only those who were removed from ministry, but also those who chose marriage instead of ministry.[8] The practice of disjoining was continued well into the 1950's when it began to be overturned for some. In 1960 the practice was officially discontinued, yet as late as 1968 disjoining occurred.

Disjoining was supported by a common theological view that a woman’s primary vocation was that of wife and mother, and, to round out the trinity, church volunteer. But at the same time, the church needed the professional labour of women, so it also proclaimed a theology that supported a public vocation for women. In an attempt to fulfill its competing interests the church then established systems that allowed but limited women’s public vocations, while protecting the view of marriage as a vocation.

> A married woman can have no regular calling in the exclusive service of the Church. Men are not hindered by marriage in the duties of the office but if a woman wishes to serve the Lord without restraint, in an ecclesiastical office, she must, under all

[8] To my knowledge there are no statistics on the percentage of United Church Training School (where most deaconess were educated) graduates who married, and it would be very difficult to accumulate those statistics. It is my observation among the living graduates that I know, that most of the graduates married. See Mary Anne MacFarlane "Faithful and Courageous Handmaidens: Deaconesses in The United Church of Canada, 1925 -1964," in *Changing Roles of Women within the Christian Church in Canada*, ed. Elizabeth Gillian Muir and Michael E. Williams, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 238-258.

> circumstances, be free from the bonds of wedlock, so long as she holds office.[9]

Supporting and mirroring the social and economic controls of the secular world[10] the church was effectively able to control this aspect of women's lives.

The ministry of deaconesses has been trivialized over the years. Despite the significant and important work of the Order, much of their efforts and contributions were patronized and undervalued. Deaconesses were poorly paid, viewed as expendable, hired on short term contracts, had inadequate pensions, and were excluded from being involved in making the decisions that regulated their lives. By and large, church authorities argued that deaconesses did not require adequate remuneration or protection against exploitative working conditions because they were only young women, giving short service until they assumed their vocation of wife and mother, and the financial support of a husband. Even though as many as half of the women designated as deaconesses remained in the service of the church for their entire working lives,[11] popular understanding highlighted that the deaconess order offered a temporary staging ground for marriage. Disjoining structurally systemized this minimization of women in the diaconate. Disjoining entrenched into policy

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[9] Christian Goldin, 19th century Methodist, quoted by Cynthia Jurisson, "The Deaconess Movement," in *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America, Vol 2,* ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marie Cantlon (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 827.

[10] Mary Kinnear, *In Subordination Professional Women 1870 - 1970* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1995), 15.

[11] Mary Anne MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens," 32. In the American United Methodist Church, between 1940 and 1958, 332 women joined the Order, and in the same period "151 relinquished their deaconess relationship to marry." Mary Agnes Dougherty, *My Calling to Fulfill: Deaconesses in the United Methodist Tradition* (New York: Women's Division, General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church, 1997), 230.

discriminatory and sexist and heterosexist attitudes. And the discrimination did not stop in 1960 when the rule was ended, or even in 1968 when the last woman was disjoined. The attitudes and beliefs supported by disjoining proved difficult to shed and were actualized directly for another 20 years, most notably when women sought to regain their status.

One Story of Disjoining

Margaret (Brown) Wonfor was disjoined in 1957. Her story illustrates the effects of the disjoining.

Margaret came from a farm in southwestern Ontario. She and the United Church were born in the same year, 1925.[12] From a family proud of a missionary Aunt Margaret who served in China for 43 years, Margaret long held a dream of being a missionary too. Insufficient money for both her and her brother to go to university meant she went to teacher's college. After eight years teaching in Toronto, Margaret decided to pursue that lingering dream and she went to the United Church Training School.[13] As graduation approached she decided she would respond to a need for a Woman's Missionary Society worker to be with the Japanese congregation in Lethbridge, Alberta. She was designated a deaconess

[12] Margaret Wonfor, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Toronto, September 24, 2007. All the details from this story come from this interview.

[13] The United Church Training school educated most of the deaconesses in the denomination. The Methodist National Training School (1894-1926) merged with the Presbyterian Deaconess and Missionary Training Home (1897-1926) to become the United Church Training School (1926-1962), which was renamed Covenant College (1962-1970), and then merged with the Anglican Women's Training College (1947-1970) which had formerly been the Church of England Deaconess and Missionary Training House (1892-1947) to become the Centre for Christian Studies (1970).

and commissioned a missionary in 1954 and headed west. Shortly after she arrived, so too did a Japanese speaking minister, so Margaret moved to a new challenge near Pincher Creek where she rode the circuit of small isolated congregations, establishing a new larger parish. Then she met Herb, an ordained minister, serving just about as far north in Alberta as she was south. Their long distance relationship began and continued with Herb's move to Ottawa. When Margaret was asked to consider a Christian Education position in Calgary she told the congregation, "There may be a complicating factor!" She knew she had to decide: marriage or ministry? She and Herb met in Winnipeg at Christmas and she returned with an engagement ring. The head of the Deaconess Order wrote promptly upon hearing the news, "we will be expecting your resignation." So, Margaret became another woman disjoined from ministry, simply because she decided to marry.

But disjoining was not the end of Margaret's ministry. Five children in six years kept Margaret focused on the home front but in recounting her life she talks about the congregations "we" served. "I worked all the time, just not for money," she explains, "but not teaming with my husband. I made my own contribution; as a parent, on committees, through the school." In the 1980s Margaret was very active in establishing community outreach in an inner city neighbourhood, "and I had a ministry of keeping in touch with people," she offers, with an expression of humble pride. Margaret served the regional and national church in several volunteer roles, but the most difficult service she gave came in the aftermath of

the General Council of 1988 where the United Church decided to offer full acceptance to lesbian and gay people.[14] As chair of a presbytery with several split and break away congregations her faith and skill was tested. Margaret and Herb retired in 1990, but continue to provide warm pastoral care and volunteer service to their church.

Margaret conveys a sense of satisfaction with her life. She made up for the lost opportunities of diaconal ministry through a fulfilling lay ministry. But she feels that the disjoining was unfair, not just for the loss of immediate employment, but most pointedly because she lost her status as a deaconess. In the 1980s, Margaret's husband experienced some serious health problems, and they were unsure if he would be able to resume work. She approached the Toronto Conference staff to see what would be required for her to be readmitted to the diaconal order. "Oh, you're one of those women we don't know what to do with" was the response she received. She was then told that she would have to begin all over again, becoming a candidate and requiring further education. Margaret explained:

> There was no thought that *anything* I had done in the past would be taken into consideration. I'm sure they wouldn't have treated an ordained person the same way. It was continued discrimination; if they hadn't taken away my status in 1957 I would still have been a diaconal minister.[15]

Margaret mourns this loss.

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[14] Margaret identified this work as the most difficult work of all that she has done in the church. Margaret Wonfor, group interview with Caryn Douglas, Toronto, September 24, 2007.

[15] Margaret Wonfor, interview with Caryn Douglas, by telephone, December 31, 2008.

Making an Apology

Hearing the recounting of the stories of disjoining stirred the passion of a lay woman, Callie Archer, to ask the church to address the hurt that had been inflicted on women. At the United Church General Council in 2003, her petition called on the church to apologize to the disjoined women for the cost to their lives from the evil of sexism. At the General Council Executive meeting in April 2006, the church made its first official apology, an action mandated to be repeated regionally across the country.

The vast majority of people in the United Church will not have ever heard of the disjoining rule. Even fewer will know of the apology. The apology was enacted to fulfill the obligation the church made in responding to the petition, but it largely lacked commitment and was devoid of passion. Decided with virtually no consultation with those who were most directly wronged by the practice, offered with little preparation among the church membership or even with those participating in the speaking of its words, couched almost entirely in the past, delivered with no deliberation regarding restitution or reconciliation and enacted with no plan for any contemporary repentance for ongoing discrimination, the apology perpetuates the poor treatment that the women received in the first place. So much opportunity was lost.

In 2007, London Conference of the United Church marked the apology by incorporating a time of recognizing disjoined women into a service at their Annual

Meeting.[16] Margaret Wonfor was one of two disjoined women present although she was not asked to play any role in the service. She was appreciative of the work that a few women in particular had put into it, especially because she sensed there was some reluctance on behalf of the Conference to have a service at all. She had received correspondence from the national church asking that she identify herself as a disjoined woman. When she approached the Conference Executive Secretary with this information, she experienced a "climate of disinterest."[17] When asked how she felt about receiving the public apology, she responded:

> They didn't apologize. … It was a brief part of a bigger service, and I really want to give credit to Heather Scott, who did her best to bring attention to the disjoining and the injustice of it all, but they didn't say, 'we are sorry'. … There was no preliminary preparation, if you already knew what it was about you might have understood, but the younger people [at that service], they really didn't have a clue. … I was disappointed, it could have been leaven, it was a lost opportunity.[18]

Not all of the disjoined women felt the need for the church to apologize. The hurt was long past for them, they have moved on. But, if the church was going to apologize anyway, the women were keen that it not be a lost opportunity. They hoped that the apology would result in some positive change in the church now. As Marion (Woods) Kirkwood, one of the affected women asked, "What about the injustices that are still happening to women in ministry and lay

[16] London Conference of The United Church of Canada, "A Service of Celebration and Remembering", Friday, May 25, 2007, Ridgetown College, Ridgetown, Ontario.
[17] Margaret Wonfor, interview with Caryn Douglas, by telephone, December 31, 2008.
[18] Margaret Wonfor, interview with Caryn Douglas, by telephone, December 31, 2008.

women in the United Church of Canada?"[19] Sadly, as Margaret observed, the opportunity seems to have been lost.

My Interest and Choice of Methodology

I am a diaconal minister in the United Church. My inauguration into the diaconal community was in 1986 when I began as a student at the Centre for Christian Studies (CCS), the school which prepares most of the members of the United Church diaconate. I lived in residence with students from other years and was blessed with a chance to get to know more than the students in my class. After being commissioned into ministry, I taught part time at CCS for a few years, again getting to know another group of students and the staff and faculty well. My five years in Toronto provided an immersion experience into the diaconal community. In 1998, when the school relocated from Toronto to Winnipeg I became its principal. For the next 10 years I lived and breathed the world of diakonia. A significant part of my work involved getting to know the alumni of the school. I estimate that I met or corresponded with 450 or so of the 620 living graduates.[20] I sat in their living rooms and in small circles in church basements, sometimes with a recorder in hand, sometimes with my pen at the ready, and I asked them to tell me their stories.

[19] Marion Kirkwood, group interview with Caryn Douglas, Toronto, April 30, 2006.

[20] Approximately 450 of the living graduates are United Church members. I also visited with diaconal ministers who are graduates of other programs and many former students who did not graduate.

I became a story carrier[21] for the community, my community. I was like a weaver, gathering brightly coloured threads to entwine with deeply stained strands. As I listened I would interlace one story with another. I tested the patterns I saw emerging and noted the responses from the women, and the few men[22], who shared their journey.

As Ruth Behar describes it, I am a "vulnerable observer."[23] I have been absorbing the stories of diaconal ministry for a quarter of a century and I consider that history and involvement an integral part of this project's research. As Behar describes it, you make yourself vulnerable in the community when "You put yourself in its way [and] it bodies forth and enfolds you."[24] Literature on narrative as a method of inquiry validates my experiences as a story carrier and a listener to the stories of others. People do lead storied lives and we tell stories of those lives. I chose narrative as a methodology because, as Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin have discerned, "narrative is both phenomenon and method. Narrative names the structured quality of experiences to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study."[25] Their naming of phenomenon or experience as "story," and the naming of inquiry into the story as "narrative" made sense to me as I approached this study.

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[21] Susan Shaw, *Storytelling in Religious Education* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1999), 21.

[22] Men began to attend the school in 1962, but never in large numbers.

[23] Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* (NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

[24] Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer*, 5.

[25] Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin, "Stories of experience and narrative inquiry," *Educational Researcher* 19(5) (1990), 2.

My story is contained and encompassed in the story of disjoining. Disjoining has affected the culture of diaconal ministry and its role in the United Church. I carry strong empathy for the women, I sympathize with their hurt, I readily join them in their critique of the denomination. I make no pretense at being neutral or unbiased. When I sat down in the United Church archives to read the minutes of the various Deaconess Committees I could hardly control my excitement. It was like opening the cover on a family history. I was thrilled to see the names of women I know, appearing first as they are presented as student candidates to become a deaconess, then as they are sent to their summer field, then when they are finally admitted to the order. Later I saw their names as members of committees or on lists of deaconesses being transferred from one position to another. Sadly in so many cases, those later references do not appear, but instead a passing note is recorded, “so and so has married.” And then silence. As this pattern settled into my consciousness, I felt tears well up. As a woman, a diaconal minister and a researcher, the story of disjoining touches me emotionally and vocationally.

But I am not just vulnerable, I am also the observer and I carry the awareness that the disjoining is *not* my story. I have played a particular, specialized role in the community, and in this specific research. I have tried to be attentive to the power dynamics, and aware of the power I have because of my position in the community during this research as principal, and latterly, former

principal, of the Centre for Christian Studies. The breadth of my knowledge and the depth of my engagement in the issues are both gift and dilemma.

I bring lifetime membership in the United Church to the research. I understand the church and how it works. I love it, and, I don't. I have held significant leadership roles and have been a decision maker at all the levels of the church. As a participant in the structures, I share in responsibility for sustaining the policies that continue to discriminate against women. At the same time, I have been an advocate for change to these policies and practices, for example, through my work at CCS and as a member of the General Council Executive. The work of my Doctor of Ministry program, gathering together the story of disjoining and the apology, is another way I am working on enabling the church, my church, to change.

In 2006 I attended the Service of Apology to Disjoined Women at the United Church's General Council Executive (GCE) meeting. I videotaped the service. After the service Marion (Woods) Kirkwood, Ruth (Sandilands) Lang, Joan (Cheesman) Willis and Wilma (Unwin) Cade and I were the guests of the GCE for lunch. While we ate, Betsy Anderson, acting as my research assistant, conducted videotaped interviews with nine GCE members who had participated in the service. I then conducted a videotaped group interview with the four women.[26]

The video footage and the data from the interviews formed the basis for a 25 minute video, *Holy Matrimony Unholy Disjoining.* The video was a

[26] Andrew Wilson, my brother-in-law, did the camera work.

preliminary project in my Doctor of Ministry program.

As preparation for attending the service I spoke with people instrumental in the apology coming about and I had a conversation with each of the disjoined women who attended, and several others who decided not to attend the service. A few weeks after the service I conducted phone interviews with the two women who initiated the apology. I also held a focus group of five diaconal ministers from Winnipeg to discuss their experiences and views on disjoining and the apology service.

In September 2007, five women[27] who graduated from the United Church Training School/Covenant College prior to 1965 and had married ordained men participated in a two day gathering to share stories from their lives and reflect on their experiences as deaconesses/diaconal ministers and clergy wives. These women also reflected together on disjoining and their experiences of it and that data has informed this writing.

Subsequent to the interviews named above, I followed up with participants to further explore and confirm details and update their reflections.

In addition to this research, I spent time in the United Church archives reviewing the minutes and correspondence from the church committees and commissions related to deaconess work from 1926 up to 1964, when deaconess oversight was transferred to the presbyteries and the practice of disjoining was less common.

[27] Dorothy Naylor, Carol Stevenson Seller, Marion (Woods) Kirkwood, Margaret (Brown) Wonfor, Margaret (Thompson) Hetherington. Elinor (Harwood) Leard was part of the preparation but was unable to participate in the gathering.

Chapter 2

HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ROOTS OF DISJOINING

The 1890's marked the beginning of deaconess orders in the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches in Canada.[28] The diaconal movement arose in a period of great theological and social transformation, with the emergence of both the social gospel and the first wave of modern feminism. This exciting time promised and provided new vistas for the participation of women in society. The movement of deaconesses afforded women greater opportunity to influence the church and to shape its ideas and practices regarding women's participation. But alongside the transformative atmosphere the prevailing ideology and theology shaped by centuries of misogynistic and sexist theology and practice, significantly limited the development of diaconal ministry.

Biblical Roots for Diaconal Ministry

Diaconal ministry[29] is rooted in both Hebrew[30] and Christian scriptures and tradition. Jesus refers to his own ministry as that of a servant using the Greek

[28] The Methodist and Presbyterian Churches, along with the Congregationalists, formed the United Church of Canada in 1925. While the orders were not officially established until the early part of the 1900s the organization and work began to take shape during this period. The first Deaconess Order in Canada was formed by the Church of England (Anglican Church of Canada) with the establishment of the Church of England Deaconess and Missionary House in 1892 and its first deaconesses set apart in 1895. Gwyn Griffith, *Weaving a Changing Tapestry* (Winnipeg: Centre for Christian Studies, Forthcoming, 2009), Appendix on Diaconal Ministry. The Congregational Union of Canada did not have a deaconess order but local congregations employed women workers who were known as deaconesses. The United Church of Canada, *The United Church of Canada Year Book 1928*, (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1928), 392.

[29] There is an order of Diaconal Ministers currently in the United Church and it is referred

work “diakonos” which is related to those who wait on tables. Acts of the Apostles (Acts 6) offers one record of the establishment of the early church diaconate. Faced with the competing demands of the responsibilities of supporting congregations and serving the needs of the outcasts and marginalized, the elders decided to divide the work into two streams. A group of deacons was established to do the latter work. Stephen, one of the deacons, was soon killed for his political advocacy for the poor. Another of the deacons, Phillip, became a roaming evangelist, in a sense working on the edges of new church development. The deacons named in Acts were men, but ample evidence details women serving as deacons as well. For example, Paul writes “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchrae.” (Romans 16:1) She is referred to as “a” deacon indicating that there were more women in this role in the very early church. Further references to women deacons in 1 Timothy support this view.

In the early church female deacons could be married, although there was no requirement for it. No scriptural warrant existed against accepting single women into the diaconate, rather the concern seems to be on curtailing remarriage. “Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well.” (1 Timothy 3:12) It is ambiguous whether this verse refers only to women deacons or to both men and women. If the latter, it

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to as Diaconal Ministry. Diaconal ministry is also a generic term to describe groups or orders of deacons and deaconesses.

[30] The Hebrew Scriptures do not identify a formal diaconate but do contain the record of many prophetic and service ministries.

does charge men with a similar responsibility for the domestic life of the family. In contrast to other scriptural warrants this would have been quite a counter cultural idea. Possibly the very early Christian community functioned in a more egalitarian manner.[31] At any rate, this passage is further evidence that women served in the role of deacon in sufficient numbers to necessitate this rule and that marriage did not seem to be a bar to carrying out the functions and responsibilities.

Diaconal Ministry in the Early Church

At first, both sexes were itinerant missionaries and provided outreach leadership in local congregations. Many extant texts refer to women deacons[32] and other roles for women such as Widows, in the first few centuries. The ministry of these women was widespread and they performed an important role in the new church. But restrictions were soon placed on the women deacons. They were allowed only to teach, visit and minister to women and orphans.[33] The church action in segregating and limiting the work of women was rooted in dualistic Greek philosophy which separated and then elevated mind over body. In this way of thinking the body was viewed with suspicion and the mind was elevated to a state of purity. Women were equated with the body while men were

[31] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women-church Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 11.

[32] For example the Didache, assumed to be written sometime between 50 and 110 CE.

[33] Nancy Hardy, *Called to Serve A Story of Diaconal Ministry in The United Church of Canada* (Toronto: Division of Ministry Personnel and Education, The United Church of Canada, 1985), 9.

equated with the mind. Women's sexuality, linked with body, was also deemed dangerous and dirty and men had to be protected from women. Women's role was relegated to the home under the authority of men: women were not to be in the public domain.[34] As well, men were forbidden to minister to the needs of women.

The initial egalitarian respect for the different kinds of ministry gave way to stratification, elevating the priestly role and diminishing the work of deacons. In the 4th century the word 'deaconess' appeared for the first time as the ministry was given a rank below that of male deacon.[35] Early biblical accounts express equality for women and men[36] only to be overshadowed by later scriptural passages which support discrimination against women.[37] As the church was becoming more institutionalized its organization reflected the patriarchy of society rather than the idealism of Jesus' egalitarian gospel. Sadly, the misogynistic paradigm has remained resistant to eradication over the centuries.

The group of women who served in the early church and were known as "widows" had a varied role through time and location, but generally they were women supported by the church who played leadership roles, perhaps a devotional role.[38] Charlotte Metheun explains that "widow" is best understood to mean a woman who lives without a man, rather than the more limited idea of a

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[34] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women-Church*, 14.

[35] Alvin J. Schmidt, *Veiled and Silenced: How culture shaped sexist theology* (Macon Georgia Mercer University Press, 1990) 216.

[36] For example, Galatians 3:28.

[37] For example, 1 Corinthians 14:34

[38] Charlotte Methuen, "The Virgin Widow A problematic social role for the Early Church," *Harvard Theological Review* Vol 90, No 3 (July 1997), 294-295.

woman whose husband has died.[39] Over time the orders of widows became lumped together with the orders of women deacons and the rules defining the groups frequently become blurred. However, concern was expressed that women church workers should have the experience of being married. Tertullian, one of the influential church fathers (circa 220), in opposition to the presence of a 20 year old virgin in the order of widows, was adamant that widows be at least 60 years old and that they should "have been married [and] … educators of children, in short …experienced in all states, so that they may readily help others with counsel and support."[40] But by the 4th century virgin-widows are clearly accepted and deaconesses "must be a chaste virgin or else a widow."[41] Opportunities for married women disappear first, but the orders of widows and virgin-widows, like deaconesses, die out by the 5th century. As they did, many women found their calling in the monastic life which did provide women with some means to continue in service but they were cloistered and tightly controlled by the church's hierarchy.

The marital status of women workers seems to have been a significant concern for the early church. The struggle to regulate and control women and the firm belief that women must be subjected to male authority gave rise to convoluted machinations. In the earliest church it was seen as possible, even favourable, that marriage coincide with service. Soon however, marriage

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[39] Charlotte Methuen, "The Virgin Widow," 287.

[40] Charlotte Methuen, "The Virgin Widow," 289, her translation of Tertullian Virg. Vel. 9, 2-3.

[41] Charlotte Methuen, "The Virgin Widow," 287, citing the *Apostolic Constitutions.*

becomes inconsistent with the expression of a vocation outside of the home. Limiting a church vocation to widows was one way to deal with the problem of women workers having accountability to two masters and divided responsibilities. Another was to justify the alternative avenue, where single women became the bride of the church. This approach is adopted by the institutional church, although evidence exists that women continued to challenge the established norm. They balked against subordinate relationships of service, whether to a husband or to the structure of the church.

Women Workers through the Middle Ages

Even though the deaconess order vanished for many centuries, uncloistered women's communities, organized to carry out social ministry, appeared in many places. One such group was the Beguines, a movement spanning the 12th to 14th centuries throughout Western Europe. The women lived in community, without any permanent vows, dedicated to a life of discipleship among the poor. But these women constantly threatened the male hierarchy of the church who were distressed by their inability to control them. Fear of the unbridled sexuality of single women was magnified in the face of whole communities of widows, unmarried women, and married women who chose to live apart from their husbands.[42] Many of these women were deemed heretics and persecuted as witches and the communities increasingly fell under the

[42] Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 197.

authority of men. The Beguines invited the protection of sympathetic males as a strategy for survival, but the cost was the relinquishing of their public and political presence, as they agreed to measures that relegated them to domestic activities.[43]

Another medieval example was the Franciscan community of the Poor Clares which began with a parallel structure to the male order established by Francis of Assisi. The original mandate and vision of the Clares was meeting and serving the poor in the world. But, against her wishes, Clare, the founder, was put in a monastery by Francis, cloistered permanently into the confines of a house. This kind of domestication reinforced the idea that the normal expression of spirituality for women was focused on the home and if women did not have a natural home, with a husband and children, then they could enter a surrogate home.[44] While the monastic life was limiting for women, it did provide witness to alternatives for women and helped to support the development of women's cultures. Monastic life flourished for women over many centuries.

Reformation and the Vocation of Wife and Mother

During the Protestant reformation, Martin Luther denounced the monastic tradition and its pseudo household, insisting all women should marry and care for Christian households. "Luther's view that a woman is 'like a nail driven into the

[43] Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, 207.
[44] Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, 160.

wall' is a vivid metaphor for her obligation to hold up a heterosexual household in which she is her husband's cherished but obedient, submissive partner."[45]

During this period the concept of wife and mother becomes identified as a vocation.[46] Luther argues it is "natural" for women to want to marry, to have children, to manage households. Luther sees this as the basic human structure imposed by God on humanity.[47] In this Luther concurs with thinkers of earlier ages that women are meant to be dominated by men, but unlike his predecessors, he is opposed to virginity as the highest calling for women. He felt that God had ordained marriage in the Garden of Eden. He argued that since marriage was the only state of relationship for women before the fall of humanity, it was required for restoration with God. Luther allowed that there would be some women who failed to marry because of extenuating social circumstances and while "unnatural" those women were not to be shunned. He did not accept women's desire to remain unmarried.[48] Luther also felt that having children, and the pain associated with child birth, was a natural gift from God and enabled the fulfillment of a woman. In some ways, this perspective was liberating as it shifted childbirth from being a perpetual punishment for women for having caused the fall and presented an alternative to women's bodies as being a source of evil.

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[45] Amy Leonard, *Nails in the Wall: Catholic Nuns in Reformation Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), viii.

[46] See Marilyn Yalom, *A History of the Wife (*New York: Harper Collins, 2002) for a popular treatment on the evolution of the concept of wife.

[47] Mary Wiesner, "Luther and Women: The Death of Two Marys," in *Feminist Theology: A Reader*, ed. Ann Loades and Karen Armstrong (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 127.

[48] Luther's view for men was not as strong. Like his contemporaries he believed that the sex drive for men was not as great as that of women, so men could remain celibate and not be consumed by their sexual nature. Mary Wiesner "Luther and Women," 127.

Luther's theological ideas were widely influential and supported other Renaissance views that women were to be subjugated to men. His metaphors and images were repeated for centuries and the view that marriage and motherhood were a vocation, the true and primary vocation for women, became deeply entrenched in Christian thought.[49] These views on women held some ambiguity, so while sustaining a deep misogyny, the Reformation also afforded greater agency to women by recognizing the validity of their lay ministry embodied through their ordinary lives.

Despite Luther's edicts, monasticism continued in Germany but underwent some change. A number of religious houses became more broadly engaged in education for women, helping to make the way for the development of a modern diaconal movement.

Diaconate Reestablished and Spreads to North America

As early as 1531, in emerging protestant denominations across Europe, there were attempts to establish diaconates for women, meeting with various amounts of success. Inspired by a visit with Mennonite deaconesses in Holland, Lutheran Friedrike Münster, with her husband Theodor Fliedner, formed a deaconess society in Germany. In 1836 they began a training school and educational centre for deaconesses in Kaiserwerth.[50] They defined the ministry as nursing, teaching and social work. The deaconesses were all single and lived

[49] Mary Wiesner, "Luther and Women," 133.
[50] Cynthia Jurisson, "The Deaconess Movement," 822.

in community.[51] The work at Kaiserwerth gained North American attention and similar orders and training centres were established first in the United States and then in Canada.

Several factors influenced the spread of the deaconess movement in this period. Foundationally young women were showing increasing interest in playing a significant role in the activities of their churches. The social upheaval of the Industrial Revolution also factored in the development of the movement. The need for humanitarian service was heightened as urban and rural poor lacked basic services and health care. The shift in labour needs and the massive numbers of immigrants spawned a desire among established North Americans for processes to acculturate these new immigrants. Deaconesses responded to these needs by providing caring service as nurses, social workers, educators and evangelists, often in crowded urban cores, but also on the edges of advancing settlement. “Deaconess work offered a professional occupation for women that, though public, was carefully circumscribed and firmly situated well within women’s proper sphere of influence.”[52]

In the late 1800s, in both the United States and Canada, the social gospel fostered an organized Christian response to the social and economic suffering, including roles for women. It asserted that both individual and collective salvation was to be found in creating the Kingdom of God on earth. A strong societal and theological conviction that a woman’s sphere was that of home and family

[51] Cynthia Jurisson, “The Deaconess Movement,” 822.
[52] Cynthia Jurisson, “The Deaconess Movement,” 821.

continued. Yet at the same time women began to take a greater part in public life, *but*, as an extension of their domestic responsibility as caregivers of the larger society. The language of domesticity and images of motherhood upheld the belief that women were more spiritually pure and therefore called to be the redeemers of the world.

> So long as sin, sorrow, pain, want are in this world, women's hands will be needed to minister to the needs. Life is more strenuous than ever, and the patience and gentleness of these women will be more and more in demand.[53]

Expectations of deaconesses in the early years were similar to those of women who remained at home keeping house and mothering children.

> From the beginning, churchmen expected the impossible from deaconesses. The ideal deaconess was to be a consecrated Christian and an excellent housekeeper with knowledge of music; she was to know the basics of nursing, be able to work as an exceptional teacher and take Sunday services when necessary. All this, showing the 'bright side' of her personality.[54]

Through the next 60 years these early expectations were largely sustained in the United Church's Deaconess Order.

The validation of the ordinary, domestic work of women as ministry was gained through the Reformation. In this period that ministry was expanded beyond the physical walls of the home as the world became the household venue for women's work. But the equating of women with the physical, bodily world, and

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[53] Church of England Deaconess House Annual Meeting Minutes, February 2, 1904 quoted in Gwyn Griffith, Unpublished Draft Manuscript, history of Centre for Christian Studies, 2006.

[54] Diane Haglund, "Side Road on the Journey to Autonomy: The Diaconate Prior to Church Union," in ed. Shirley Davy, *Women, Work and Worship* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1983), 207.

its corollary assumption that the world of ideas and politics was for men persisted. Subsequently this 'natural' but limited extension of women's sphere was reinforced. As 20th century suffragette Nellie McClung satirically pointed out, women could be expected to "lift mortgages, or build churches, or any other light work, but the real heavy work of the church, such as moving resolutions in the general conference or assemblies, must be done by strong, hardy men!"[55]

In the beginning of the modern era the theological position remains that women's highest calling is to that of wife and mother while the possibility of exercising that vocation outside of the home starts to take shape. As the new United Church was being formed this understanding of women's vocation was gaining strength. There were liberating aspects to this position, an improvement over previous views of women. Women gained more agency, enabling the recognition that women have spirituality and a soul. Women were offered a third option beyond temptress (Eve) or virgin (Mary). However, it put women into a domestic box, inviting women to sing: "you in your small corner and I in mine." Nevertheless tensions begin to emerge between the domestic role of wife and mother and the increasing need for labour in the growing industrialized world. Women danced between meeting the expectations of domestic life and duty in the public world. Sadly, when their dance was judged to have been out of step or out of balance, the dominant political and religious authorities reacted in a way that clarified who was leading.

[55] Nellie McClung*, In Times Like These* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 112.

One of the ways that the church tried to mediate the tension between encouraging women to have a vocation in the church while sustaining the belief that the true vocation for women is wife and mother was to use images of marrying the church. So, ironically, while the early church was concerned about limiting the remarriage of deacons, United Church deaconesses were, in a sense, encouraged into it. They were required to make a first commitment to a relationship with the church, while it was explicitly expected that they would make a second commitment, when the better opportunity presented itself. The liturgical order for the "Setting Apart of Deaconesses" in part reads like a marriage service. The deaconess candidates are told that they are "Released from other cares, you give yourselves without reservation, according to the will of God, to the service of the Lord and His Church, wherever your lot may be cast."[56] God is called upon to be in relationship with the deaconesses, and is implored to "Be thou their joy and gladness, their comfort in sorrow, their counsel in doubt …"[57] A 1947 deaconess recruitment pamphlet capitalizes on this metaphor, making it explicit that the deaconess was in a marriage relationship with the church, "because in [the deaconess] are combined the minister and the minister's wife."[58] Marilyn Vivian saw the deaconess preparation program shaping the women to be wives, either to the male minister for whom they would work as a deaconess in

[56] The United Church of Canada, *Forms of Services for the Offices of the Church* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1926), 130-1.

[57] The United Church of Canada, *The Book of Common Order* (Toronto: United Church of Canada, 1932).

[58] Mary Anne MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens: Deaconesses in The United Church of Canada, 1925 to 1964" (MA thesis, University of Toronto, 1987), 83.

the church, or for a life partnership with her husband. As a student at the United Church Training School in the 1950s, Vivian felt she was being taught "how to be a good wife – take out 'wife' and put in 'deaconess'. Make sure he's rested, that everything he needs is beside him and all that."[59] The church could accept single women into ministry, as long as their ministry was that of a pseudo-wife.

The entry of women into the church labour force enabled the church to exploit the energies of women, but also retain control on them. As early as 1922, both Presbyterian and Methodist deaconesses challenged the control being exercised over their status and employment despite lack of direct access to power. The Methodist deaconesses "stated that if the [Church] was not prepared to rectify the situation immediately, the Order should be disbanded."[60] But the Methodist Church did little to address the concerns or empower the deaconesses. Rather, they committed to making certain "the *right kind* of workers [could] be found, (emphasis mine)"[61] workers who would be compliant with the rules. As one of the disjoined deaconesses, Wilma Cade pointed out, deaconesses were not always the kind of workers the church desired. She observes:

> the image in the church was that a deaconess was a pious, narrow, good, boring woman, but my experience of deaconesses is that this is just not the case ... they got done what needed to be done, and

[59] Gwyn Griffith, Unpublished Draft Manuscript, history of Centre for Christian Studies, 2006.

[60] Gwyn Griffith, *Weaving a Changing Tapestry* (Winnipeg: Centre for Christian Studies, Forthcoming, 2009), Appendix on Diaconal Ministry.

[61] United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto), Fonds 21. Report of the Commission of Inquiry to the General Board of Management of the Deaconess Society of the Methodist Church", March 1923. 98.104C Box 2-1, cited in Gwyn Griffith, *Weaving a Changing Tapestry*, Appendix on Diaconal Ministry.

> this has always been the spirit of the diaconal movement, we have not been the nice, tame woman that the church really wanted.[62]

The women were strong and as their consciousness and ability to effect change grow, the wheels of change begin to turn, but it takes many decades.

The Practice of Marriage Bars

Margaret Wonfor pointed out, “So many [church] people, when they hear what the church did to me, they try to excuse it by saying, ‘Oh, that happened to teachers too’ as if that makes it okay. I think they are saying ‘we don’t need to be accountable.’ ”[63] Marriage bars were in place in virtually every profession that employed women in significant numbers, all over the world. These bars prohibited women from entering training or a profession if married and from continuing in the job after marriage. Margaret continued, “But the United Church policy of disjoining was different, I don’t know if people can understand that, we lost our status too and that was the part that really stung.”[64] Deaconesses were removed from employment and also had their credentials revoked, making it nearly impossible for them to return to work when circumstances changed.

Marriage bars appear in the late 1800s partly as a result of institutionalized capitalism and the need for a ready and flexible work force that could be engaged when needed but set aside without being problematic when

[62] Wilma Cade, group interview with Caryn Douglas, Toronto, April 30, 2006.
[63] Margaret Wonfor, interview with Caryn Douglas, by telephone, December 31, 2008.
[64] Margaret Wonfor, interview with Caryn Douglas, by telephone, December 31, 2008.

not in demand. [65] The dominant role for men as the bread winner of the family, made it more difficult to treat men as expendable, although, this too did occur when men were laid off from jobs, but generally during extreme economic times. Middle-class women, on the other hand, were understood only to be earning extra money, not seen as contributing to the mainstay of a family.[66] The economic plight of poor families and widows with children, who depended on the income, was not acknowledged in this mythology. The marriage bars were linked to the class of women who could afford to comply, those women who could actually fulfill the vocational expectation of wife and mother and manager of a household. United Church deaconesses were commonly from this middle class.[67] An inherent classism was encompassed in marriage bars and in the practice of disjoining.

Heterosexism was also implicit in the social and theological construction that supported marriage bars. The assumption of heterosexual patterns of relationship, including the marriage of a man and woman, is pervasive.[68] The church apologized for its sexism, but it did not even begin to comprehend how the rule sustained other kinds of systemic discrimination.

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[65] There are a few examples of marriage bars for men. Priesthood is one. In the 1950s some American airlines dismissed stewards as well as stewardesses who married. Claudia Goldin, "Marriage bars: Discrimination Against Married Women Workers, 1920 -1950s," Working Paper No. 2747 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research Working Papers, October 1988), 33.

[66] Lynn Meadows, “Discovering Women's Work: A study of Post-Retirement Aged Women,” *Marriage and Family Review* Vol. 24, No. 1-2.2, (1996), 178.

[67] Gwyn Griffith, *Weaving a Changing Tapestry*. Appendix on Diaconal Ministry.

[68] See Sheila Cavanagh, "The Heterosexualization of the Ontario Woman Teacher in the Post War Period," *Canadian Woman Studies,* Vol 18, No 1 (Spring 1998).

Marriage bars were often in place through legislation, for example, in 1925 legislation was enacted in Ontario allowing school boards to bar married women from teaching. It was not lifted until 1946.[69] Whether legislated or company policy the practice was often administered unevenly; the discontinuance of the legislation did not guarantee that marriage bars were suspended. The employer benefited from this state of flux, the bar could be used as a reason to dismiss unproductive or uncooperative employees, or dismiss more senior staff who were eligible for higher wages and replace them with cheaper workers. Generally, the rules were more rigidly enforced during periods of labour surplus or economic recession and relaxed when workers were needed. The threat of the bar alone acted as a tool for labour management. Bars were not universal, in many jurisdictions, they were not required.[70] Compliance with the cultural norms was sufficient to keep women in their proper place, not just in the 1940s and 50s, but for decades beyond that.

Official marriage bars begin to disappear in the 1940s. The need for women's labour during the war factored significantly in this change. In many places the rules were not formally reinstated after the war, although women were forced out of the workforce, but that banishment included single as well as married women. Dramatic change occurred in the 1950s. Claudia Goldin suggests the primary reason that this happened was the decline in the birth rate that began in North America in the late 1920s. As a result, by the 1950s, there

[69] Sheila Cavanagh, "Heterosexualization of the Woman Teacher," 65.
[70] Claudia Goldin, "Marriage bars," 4.

were fewer young, single women.[71] This certainly was the period when the United Church was faced with the largest shortage of women for diaconal work. In 1957 there were 80 jobs open for the 12 graduating deaconesses available to fill them.[72] Faced with this growing crisis, the image of married women workers is reconstructed and they become desirable. Where only a few decades earlier, "marriage minded teachers", for example, were undedicated and unreliable,[73] married women become sought after because they are more mature, "more naturally courteous."[74] This marks a shift, the economic imperative wins out over the previously more powerful social construction. A space for theological reconstruction of the parameters for women's faithful vocations opens up and eventually the United Church embraces change in its perspectives, but not without a fight.

The church provided the theological justification for domesticating women's labour and thereby contributed to the social theory that supported marriage bars. Women, like men, were trained to believe that it was a moral good for women to play a secondary role, allowing the men to have the primary paid employment as the "naturally" dominant member of a family. The churches perpetuated the image of women as men's "helpmate" and the concept that the home was the ordained venue for women's full expression. The economic

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[71] Claudia Goldin "Marriage bars," 25.

[72] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501 Minutes of the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Working Women, May 8, 1957, 6. Series 206 82.292C Box 2-5.

[73] Sheila Cavanagh, "Professionalism as a Legislated Code of Moral Conduct :The Government of the Woman Teacher in Education, Ontario 1918-1949," (PhD diss., Toronto: York University, 1999), 8.

[74] Claudia Goldin "Marriage bars," 29.

argument for sustaining marriage bars alone was not sufficient; these philosophical/religious ideas were required to perpetuate it.[75] Christian theology also supported the idea that women workers were always temporary employees, because they were enroute to a higher calling. The standards of training, working conditions for women, and the provision of benefits therefore were not moral obligations for a transient woman worker. The United Church not only disjoined its own women workers, it participated in creating the conditions which discriminated against women in other sectors.

The church had other options than to limit women's employment. Other models existed. For example, in Sweden in the 1930s, the debate about barring women arrived at a different conclusion. "The right to mother was cast as a citizen right, and the right to work as a mother's right."[76] The Swedes believed that if women were to be effective parents, they had to have unrestricted rights to full participation in society. This outcome was achieved by beginning in the same place that the church did: by appealing to the traditional values of motherhood and family and women's responsibility for them, but concluded by protecting women from discrimination. The United Church could have looked to itself for a model. The church exercised a different approach in its decision to be a Canadian pioneer and ordain women, albeit single women, in 1936. The church

[75] See Thom Sheridan and Pat Stretton, "Mandarins, Ministers and the Bar on Married Women," *The Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vo. 46, (March 2004), where they detail that the marriage bar was sustained in Australia even in times when labour shortages were severe. They conclude, "the marriage bar was a much more complicated process than hither to generally realised."

[76] Anne Lise Ellinngsaeter, "Women's Right to Work: The interplay of state, market and women's agency," *NORA*, Nos. 2-3, Volume 7, (1999), 115.

carried the seeds of its own renewal: it knew of other options, but had difficulty nurturing them to growth.

Marriage Bar in the Woman's Missionary Society

The Woman's Missionary Society (WMS) employed the largest number of United Church women,[77] but not all WMS workers were deaconesses.[78] The WMS operated quite independently of the United Church as a church within a church.[79] Its own set of rules governed its workers. WMS deaconesses were subjected to the disjoining rule through their accountability to the Order. Other WMS workers were not members of an order, but employees of the WMS, although many expected that they would serve the WMS for a lifetime. These women were not subject to the specific disjoining rule of the Deaconess Order. However, the WMS had its own marriage bar. When a woman married her employment was ended.[80] This marriage bar was never revoked, it continued

[77] The WMS employed women as missionaries in Canada and throughout the world.

[78] A WMS worker could apply to be a deaconess at anytime, as long as she was within the age of acceptance. In 1953, however, in a move to create more unification in women's work in the church WMS women were invited to make application to become deaconesses and a number did. This invitation was extended again in 1962 as the WMS was ended. Twenty-one women applied at that time to become deaconesses. Committee on Diaconal Ministry, *History of Diaconal Ministry in The United Church of Canada 1925 – 1991* (Toronto: Division of Ministry Personnel and Education, The United Church of Canada, 1991), 100.

[79] Donna Sinclair, *Crossing Worlds: The Story of the Woman's Missionary Society of The United Church of Canada* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1992), 107; Shelagh Parson,"Women and Power in The United Church of Canada" in *Women Work and Worship in The United Church of Canada*. ed. Shirley Davy and Nancy Hardy, 170-188. (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1983), 178.

[80] Some WMS women married a male missionary. If he continued under appointment of the Board of Mission, the woman would also be appointed by the Board in the role of the wife of the missionary, but she was not paid.

until the WMS ceased operations in 1962.[81] In her book on the WMS, Donna Sinclair comments on how frequently the metaphor of family was used to describe the WMS. The imagery of family was also employed prominently in the deaconess training and Order. The WMS played the role of parent to the "daughter who has come home."[82] When WMS women married into a new family, their formal connection with the old family was severed. They were no longer invited to family gatherings. It was not called disjoining but it was experienced in many of the same ways.

[81] When the WMS ceased operation in 1962 its work was incorporated into the mission work of the United Church. Married women were appointed as missionary staff by the Board of Mission, but only as part of a couple. There was only one pay cheque, and that was for the man. This left missionary wives without any pension, even if they had been appointed by the church for their entire working lives. This practice continued until the 1970s.

[82] Career long WMS worker, Kathleen Metheral quoted in Donna Sinclair, *Crossing Worlds,* 15.

Chapter 3

DEACONESSES AND DISJOINING IN THE UNITED CHURCH

Methodist and Presbyterian Roots

In 1891, The Methodist Church in Canada passed a special resolution "relating to the systematic organization of consecrated Christian women, similar to the order of deaconesses in Primitive Christianity."[83] However, while the General Conference decided against establishing an Order,[84] a group in Toronto organized themselves as the Deaconess Aid Society. In 1894, they invited influential laywoman, Lucy Rider Meyer to speak. A decade before, Rider Meyer had established the American Methodist Chicago Training School (CTS) for deaconesses.[85] Shortly after her visit a training home was established in Toronto and in 1895, the first three women were designated as Canadian Methodist deaconesses. In 1908 the Deaconess Society became an official part of the Methodist national structure.[86] In the Presbyterian Church, the Ewart Training Home was established in 1897 (primarily for missionaries). In 1909 directives for

[83] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 21. Methodist Church in Canada Toronto Conference minutes for June 10-17, 1891, 78.101C, Box 1 quoted in Gwyn Griffith, *Weaving a Changing Tapestry*, unpublished draft, 2006.

[84] For the sake of simplicity I have used the word Order to describe organized Methodist and Presbyterian deaconesses from the beginning, even though that term was not officially recognized until later. Lucy Rider Meyer refers to the Canadian deaconesses as being an "order" in her 1897 publication, *The Deaconess and Their Work.*

[85] Gwyn Griffith, *Weaving a Changing Tapestry* (Winnipeg: Centre for Christian Studies, Forthcoming, 2009), Appendix on Diaconal Ministry.

[86] Gwyn Griffith, *Weaving a Changing Tapestry*, Appendix on Diaconal Ministry.

the establishment of a Presbyterian Deaconess Order were issued by the General Assembly.[87]

Like their American sisters, Canadian Methodist deaconesses were required to reside in a deaconess home, wear a prescribed uniform and survive with little remuneration. “No salaries shall be paid, the work of the Deaconess being done for the love of Christ, and in his Name.”[88] Also like the American Order, the diaconate was reserved for single women. The practice of limiting the diaconate to single women was wide spread, and also characteristic of the Presbyterian Order.

The Presbyterian strategy put a great emphasis on encouraging women to remain single and commit themselves to service for life.[89] The Methodists openly recognized women might have two calls. Lucy Rider Meyer wrote, “If God calls you to serve Him in the little circle of the domestic family, he does not call you to serve Him in the larger family of humanity’s needy ones. And do not doubt that the one call is as truly from God as the other.”[90] But for those not called to marriage, she saw the diaconate as a place where they could carry out a woman’s true nature, for, “The deaconess movement puts the mother into the

[87] Gwyn Griffith, *Weaving a Changing Tapestry*, Appendix on Diaconal Ministry.

[88] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 21. Methodist Church (Canada). Deaconess Society, General Board of Management Minutes, 1912, 78.101C, Box 1-4 quoted in Gwyn Griffith, *Weaving a Changing Tapestry*, Appendix on Diaconal Ministry.

[89] Gwyn Griffith, *Weaving a Changing Tapestry*, Appendix on Diaconal Ministry.

[90] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 21. Lucy Rider Meyer, “Why I Should Not Enter Christian Service,” Methodist National Training School pamphlet, n.d. c.1916. 78.101C, Box 5-44.

Church."[91] Ironically, Rider Meyer was critical of the early church practice of disallowing married deaconesses, explaining that:

> One of the causes that led to the decline of the Order, was the fact that Deaconesses were obliged to live in Widows' Homes, were forbidden to marry, and their lives became morbid and unnatural. As the obloquy attached to marriage on the part of Deaconesses increased, less [sic] women were willing to enter the Order."[92]

I found no evidence that she, or others in the movement, applied this analysis to the contemporary situation. The limitation on service for married women was not questioned; any debate over the issue was focused on upholding the view that the vocation of wife and mother was worthy.

Disjoining in the New United Church Deaconess Order

In 1926 the Methodist and Presbyterian Deaconess Orders were joined into the Deaconess Order of the United Church and put under the authority of what comes to be called the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers.[93] At the time there were 951 women workers identified in the United Church: deaconesses were 116 of these workers.[94] The new order was limited to

[91] Isabelle Horton, *The Burden of the City* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1904), 146.

[92] Lucy Rider Meyer, *The Deaconess and her Work Biblical, Early Church, European, American* (Chicago: The Deaconess Advocate, 1897), no page numbers.

[93] As Mary Anne MacFarlane points out the structure governing the Order underwent frequent change. When concerns were raised about systemic issues of injustice regarding women workers and proposals were put forward, substantive change often failed, instead the governance structure was rejigged. Mary Anne MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens: Deaconesses in The United Church of Canada, 1925 to 1964" (MA diss., University of Toronto, 1987).

[94] Mary Anne MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens," 24.

single women.[95] [96] This restriction remained until 1960, when the rule was officially removed from the Deaconess Constitution.

In the background history to the 1926 Constitution of the Deaconess Order,[97] reference is made to the marriage bar practice. In both founding denominations, a woman automatically ceased to be a member of the Order upon marriage. Yet neither the Methodist nor Presbyterian constitutions explicitly included the rule.[98] Perhaps the bar was so entrenched in the mindset of the times it was assumed that the rule did not need to be recorded.

In the constitutions and in reports, both denominations repeatedly refer to "young women" as the intended candidates for the diaconate. Implicitly this seems to have been understood as meaning *single* women. The Methodists, however, did make it clear that women could leave the Order, "No vow shall be exacted from any Deaconess, and anyone of their number shall be at liberty to relinquish her position as a Deaconess at any time."[99] Both the Methodists and

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[95] The documents have references to deaconess candidates who are identified as "Mrs." They were likely widows, as in this Presbyterian example, "Mrs Mabel Lindsay, wife of the late Rev. M.A. Lindsay." The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 130. Minutes of the Meeting on the Deaconess Committee and Board of Management of the Presbyterian Missionary and Deaconess Training Home, March 21, 1924, 2. 79.175C, Box 1-4.

[96] In the 1960s the United Church approved a category of male lay professional workers called Certified Churchmen, although the number of men seeking admission was, and has remained small. In the 1980s men were incorporate fully into the diaconate. In 2008, 7% of United Church Diaconal Ministers were men. Disjoining never applied to men.

[97] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501 Constitution of the Deaconess Order 1926, The United Church of Canada n. d. 82.292C, Box 1-1.

[98] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 21. Constitution of the Deaconess Order, Methodist Church, *Deaconess Yearbook 1920-22, Deaconess Society of the Methodist Church* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1922) Box 78.101.C Box 5. The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 130. *The Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada 1914* (Toronto: Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1914), 79.175C Box 1-4.

[99] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 21. *1st Annual Report Toronto Deaconess Home and Training School of the Methodist Church 1894-1895*, (Toronto, William

Presbyterians made it clear that a deaconess was expected to give all of her time to her work,[100] implicitly ruling out a married deaconess, who would have had other demands upon her time.

In 1926 the United Church Deaconess Constitution makes the assumption explicit: "On marrying a deaconess ceases to be a member of the Order."[101] The document also reiterates the rule of both founding denominations that withdrawal or dismissal from the Order would also result when a deaconess was not engaged in accountable church work, and, that should she withdraw and later want to be readmitted she would, "receive the status that was hers at the time of withdrawal."[102]

The 1927 News Letter to Deaconesses reports that "Several deaconesses have withdrawn from the Order through marriage"[103] and in 1929 it is reported that, "Miss Agnes Allan, who was for many years deaconess of MacDougall United Church in Edmonton, was married to Mr. Lyman Delmer Parney … We hope she may have every joy in her new life."[104] It was indeed a new life, as marriage ended any relationship with the Order and the ranks were constantly being diminished. In 1928 the minutes of the Committee on Employed Women

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Briggs, 1895), 7. 78.101C, Box 5-44.

[100] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 21. *Annual Report Toronto Deaconess Home and Training School of the Methodist Church 1906-07* (Toronto, William Briggs, 1907) no page numbers. 78.101C Box 4-17. Fonds 130. Calendar of the Presbyterian Missionary and Deaconess Training Home, Session 1922-23, Toronto. 79.175C Box 2-4.

[101] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Constitution of the Deaconess Order 1926, The United Church of Canada, n.d., no page number. 82.292C Box 1-1.

[102] Constitution of the Deaconess Order 1926, no page number.

[103] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Autumn newsletter to Deaconesses of The United Church of Canada, 1927, no page number. 82.292C Box 1-1.

[104] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Letter from Winnifred Thomas, Executive Secretary Interboard Committee on Women Workers to Deaconesses of The United Church of Canada, Spring 1929. 82.292C Box 1-1

Workers in the Church grant three soon to be married deaconesses an "honourable discharge."[105] The minutes of the Committee also note, "Another problem is presented in the fact that the average term of service given by women is a short one and that new recruits must constantly be found."[106] However, there is no record of whether this minuted concern was informed by a discussion of the practice of "honourable discharge" for married women. The record is silent. In fact, no recorded discussion of the practice of the marriage bar appears in any extant minutes from the adjudicatory structure, the deaconess and women workers associations or the training school. Only in the 1950s, just prior to its repeal does it appear as an item for debate. Neither the quality nor quantity of that debate is recorded. Until the 1950s the church, like the women affected by the rule, just seemed to accept as a given that deaconesses must be single.

The word disjoining does not appear in the 1926 version of the Constitution, nor in any subsequent revised Constitutions. Other terms, "withdrawal", "withdrawn", "removed", "resigned", "cease to be", are used in official documents and minutes. The first use I found of the term disjoining is in the 1932 minutes of the Deaconess Committee: "it was agreed to recommend [to the Inter-Board Committee on Women Workers in the United Church of Canada] that Miss Gussie McWilliam and Miss Flossie Moore be disjoined from the

[105] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Minutes of the Committee on Employed Women Workers in the Church, October 21, 1928, 4. 82.292C Box 1-2.
[106] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Minutes of the Committee on Employed Women Workers in the Church, June 26, 1928, 3. 82.292C Box 1-2.

Deaconess Order, since they failed to fulfill the conditions of designation."[107] These women however, were not being disjoined because they married, but rather because they were not working for the church. This is important to note. When the disjoining rule regarding marriage disappears, disjoining does not, as women continue to be disjoined because of their employment status.

The first usage of the term disjoining in relationship to marriage is found in the 1934 Committee minutes, which record,

> that Miss Annie Harris is to be married on April 11 this year and it was, therefore, voted to recommend that she be disjoined from the order with regret and that the good wishes of the Committee be expressed to her.[108]

No indication of the source of the term disjoining is referenced, it just appears. The only other uses of the term in relation to the church, that I have been able to locate, are found in Presbyterian sources.[109] However, the term is not used in the Presbyterian Deaconess Order prior to 1926.[110] From this time on it appears in the minutes, but not consistently, as other terms are used. By the 1940s the term was widely known and applied. In addition to disjoining women for marriage or for leaving active employment, at least one woman was disjoined when she became

[107] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Minutes of the Deaconess Committee, June 21, 1932, 2. 82.292C Box 1-1.

[108] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Minutes of the Deaconess Committee, February 19, 1934, 2. 82.292C Box 1-1.

[109] In one case a Presbyterian minister was disjoined from the New Zealand Church in the late 1800s and disjoining is the term currently used by the Presbyterian Church in Australia when a congregation is removed from the denomination.

[110] A more thorough examination of the Presbyterian documents might reveal its use in parlance, it is not in the official documents.

ordained. Margarite Miller, who was the first deaconess to be ordained was "disjoined since she was ordained by Manitoba Conference in June 1949."[111]

Responsibility for Enacting Disjoining

By whatever term the disjoining occurred, it was enacted by the United Church of Canada. In the two founding denominations oversight of the Orders rested with the training schools. This became a growing concern and during the process of merging the two orders oversight became integrated into the structures of the denomination. Much was gained by bringing the Order into the mainstream of the church, but it was accomplished by a loss of autonomy. Deaconesses themselves were not members of the church courts which appointed representatives to the various committees related to deaconess work and deaconesses had little direct representation on them. Meaningful representation was not achieved until the 1980s.[112] Deaconesses were trained by the new United Church Training School and then set apart or designated as deaconesses, and made members of the Order of Deaconesses by the United Church through one of its regional Conferences. Authority for the appointment to specific ministries was also the responsibility of the Order, through the Committee. The specifics of the work and working conditions[113] lay with the

[111] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Minutes of the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers, October 17, 1949. 82.292C Box 1-6.

[112] For example, in the 1936 restructuring of the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers, only two of thirty positions were for deaconesses. Mary Anne MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens," 44.

[113] Presbyterian deaconesses were always given a wage. In 1918 the Methodists began to pay a salary to deaconesses, although in both cases the salaries were very low and the

employer although the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers made some attempts to set minimum standards. Deaconesses in congregations worked for the minister, those serving in church administrative roles (such as National Girl's Work Secretary) were accountable to the church body, WMS employees to the WMS Board. The deaconesses always had a dual accountability however, as the rules of the Order governed them, such as the wearing of uniforms, the age for admission and compliance with disjoining. From 1926 to 1960, the General Council approved the Constitution of the Order.

The responsibility for recommending and administering the disjoining rule was that of the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers, in conjunction with its sub-committee on the Deaconess Order.[114] Deaconesses had an Association of their own, which met bi-annually, but the Order was represented in the church structure through the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers. Through the 1940s the Committee favoured the practice of disjoining. Even in the context of a huge shortage of church personnel caused by the Second World War, their report to the General Council (1944) did not suggest easing or removing the marriage bar to fill some of the estimated 200 vacancies. Rather they repeated with greater enthusiasm the call for "consecrated young women…to render either full time or volunteer service."[115]

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women themselves complained that they were inadequate. Gwyn Griffith, *Weaving a Changing,* Appendix on Diaconal Ministry.

[114] This Committee reported to the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers. In minutes it is variously referred to the Deaconess Work Committee, the Deaconess Order Committee and the Committee on the Deaconess Order.

[115] Agenda 11th General Council of The United Church, 1944, 406, cited in .Mary Anne MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens," 59.

Nor did they seem interested in recruiting previously disjoined women. In 1946, Mrs. Annie Walker wrote to the Committee with a request to be reinstated.[116] Her request was denied. At the next meeting, the appeal of the decision is recorded, but again the request is denied. The Committee directs the Executive Secretary to inform Mrs. Walker that she has exceeded the "normal age [for service] of 55."[117] One can only guess at the situation: was she a widow left without a means of economic support who wanted to earn a living? The Deaconess Constitution promised a deaconess who was reinstated that she would "receive the same status that was hers at the time of her withdrawal,"[118] but only if her application were accepted. The church held all the power, to be both judge and jury.

Even if deaconesses had been better represented on the Committee on the Deaconess Order, and in that way influenced the perspective of the Committee, in the United Church's council system the Committee lacked power to implement its ideas. It could only recommend to the General Council and the Committee's recommendations were not just rubber stamped.[119] Until 1964, Deaconesses could only be commissioners to the General Council or its Executive if they took a spot that would otherwise be filled by a lay person. Most

[116] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Minutes of the Committee on the Deaconess Order, March 15, 1946, 82.292C Box 1-6. Even though the war had ended and men were returning, these minutes recorded a continued shortage of workers to full the requests.

[117] Not knowing this woman's birth name it is not possible to determine from the records of deaconesses and training school graduates how old she was in 1946.

[118] United Church of Canada, *The Manual of The United Church of Canada* (Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 1944), 173.

[119] See Mary Anne MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens".

women were reluctant to do that, subsequently few attended the Council.[120] The regulations governing the Deaconess Order were approved by the entire church, without much opportunity for deaconesses to participate directly in the decision making.

Disjoining Rule for Marriage Ended

An action of the General Council in 1960 finally removed the marriage bar from the Deaconess Constitution. As early as 1951 the Committee had expressed the intention to remove the rule, but opposition within the Committee structure was voiced, affecting its implementation.

The Sub-Committee on Deaconess Work, which worked most directly with the deaconesses, was more conservative than the full Committee and the General Council. In 1951, the Sub Committee agreed to accept a proposed revision to the Constitution removing the clause about marriage.[121] This is reported to the full Committee and adopted there.[122] However, at the next meeting of the sub-committee in 1952 a motion to reintroduce the clause to the section on the Termination of Membership was carried.[123] Jean Hutchinson, Principal of the United Church Training School asked that her negative vote be

[120] Mary Anne MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens," 129.

[121] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Minutes of the Deaconess Work Committee, December 14, 1951. 82.292C Box 1-6. The minutes do not even hint at what brought about the decision to make this move although the demand for trained Christian education workers was growing.

[122] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Minutes of the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers, February 14, 1952. 82.292C Box 2-5.

[123] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Minutes of the Deaconess Work Committee, May 2, 1952. 82.292C Box 1-6.

recorded. Clearly this issue was contentious and led to heated debate.

Strong reactions to this decision emerged. A letter to Tena Campion, the Executive Secretary of the Committee, from Harriett Christie, the Dean of the United Church Training School declared:

> I do not see why marriage, per se, disqualifies a woman from membership in the Deaconess Order. If membership in the Order results from the call of God to serve Him, I do not see why marriage invalidates that call.… Marriage in itself does not necessarily alter either the nature or the quality of the work, for many married women in all vocations continue to work after marriage. I can think of no vocation where marriage automatically removes status, and I do not see why it should in this case. One of the tasks of the Committee on the Deaconess Order is to work for a growing recognition within the Church of the place and contribution of women and to develop within the Church the understanding which is increasing in other areas of life that men and women are persons of equal worth in the sight of God and deserve to be so treated, with each person being judged according to his [sic] own worth. It seems to me that this clause in the [Deaconess Order] Constitution contributes to the attitude that women's place is in the home, that women may be classified together rather than individual persons considered for her own merits.[124]

The full Committee was not persuaded by the sub-committee reversal to its initial decision; they continued to support the removal of the marriage bar. However, the Committee did not take the revised Constitution to the General Council for adoption so the rule remained in place.

While the full Committee's actions leaned toward a progressive change, the sub-committee continued to act to protect the rules that limited women's access to the Deaconess Order and employment. The Constitution had a clause

[124] Mary Anne MacFarlane, "Background Paper Apology to United Church Deaconesses and Ordained Women," United Church of Canada General Council Executive Meeting Docket, Appendix 4 (April 21-25, 2005), p DR55.

limiting candidates to women between the ages of 23 and 35. The sub-committee used a strict interpretation of this clause to exclude another group of women, those over the acceptable age. In 1954 they received a request for reinstatement from Mrs. Margaret Turner, who was 55. Her reinstatement was denied because of her age. [125] In 1955, Alice Philip graduated from the United Church Training School. The school gave Alice unconditional endorsement as a candidate. However, her application to become a deaconess was denied by the sub-committee because she "was over the age by 10 years for a deaconess candidate." The sub-committee further advised the Training School to reconsider its policies on the age of admission of students.[126] At this same meeting they established a policy that the committee would not pass on the names of trained women who were not deaconesses to congregations looking for personnel, despite the report that in one month alone the committee had received "23 urgent requests from congregations."[127] They would not grant deaconess status to the two women, aged 44 and 55, neither would they make it known that these women were seeking employment. Instead of opening up access to the diaconate and opportunities for more women to get training, they were advocating for policy that continued limiting women's opportunities.[128]

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[125] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Minutes of the Committee on Deaconess Work, June 28, 1954. 82.292C Box 1-6.

[126] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Minutes of the Committee on Deaconess Work, March 1, 1955. 82.292C Box 1-6.

[127] Minutes of the Committee on Deaconess Work, March 1, 1955.

[128] In 1955 Grace Glenn, who was seven years over the limit, was accepted as a deaconess, but only because, "in the judgment of this Committee her other qualifications compensate for being seven years over the age." The United Church of Canada Archives

In 1953 the full Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers received correspondence with a request from deaconess Ruth Sandilands (Lang) for an exemption to the marriage bar. Ruth was planning to be married in the spring and the congregation she was serving had agreed to keep her employed for two years beyond her marriage. The Committee passed a motion that "since it will be possible for Miss Sandilands to continue to serve after her marriage that she be permitted to retain her status in the Deaconess Order as long as she continues to perform duties of a deaconess."[129] However, Ruth did not get married in 1953. When she did marry in 1955, her employment with Grace United Church in Brampton, Ontario ended and she was disjoined.[130]

Unfortunately, the minutes of the sub-committee from 1957 to its end in 1962 are not in the archives so it is not possible know if they received requests for exemptions. In 1956, however, the sub-committee did pass a motion supporting a revision to the Constitution eliminating the marriage bar, a reversal of their 1952 reconsideration. Harriett Christie, then the Principal of the United Church Training School, seconded the motion.[131]

The full Committee however, did deal with other requests for exemptions, two in 1956, one in 1957 and two in 1959. They were all granted, noting that "in view of the revisions being recommended to the General Council, action be taken

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(Toronto) Fonds 501. Minutes of the Committee on Deaconess Work, April 12, 1955. 82.292C Box 1-6.

[129] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Minutes of the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers, January 1953. 82.292C Box 2-5.

[130] Ruth Lang, interview by Caryn Douglas, Oakville, ON, January 12, 2006.

[131] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Minutes of the Committee on Deaconess Work, March 28, 1956. 82.292C Box 1-6.

now as a committee to register concurrence with the request."[132] The extensions however, were only for the duration that the women continued to serve in their present appointment, even more narrowly defined than in the first exemption given in 1953. Any change in their employment status meant these women were automatically disjoined. During this same period the Committee received information from the Executive Secretary of the marriages of twenty deaconesses and their resignations from the Order, as well as the information that at least four students from the United Church Training School were to be married instead of becoming deaconesses.[133] During this period in her bi-annual letters from the Executive Secretary to the Order, Tena Campion does not share the information about the possibility of applying for an exemption. At least some of the students at the United Church Training School were not aware of the exemptions either.[134] It is worth noting again the context of this period: an overwhelming shortage of deaconesses and an increasing demand. Allowing exemptions contingent on the continuation of the current working position only postponed disjoining. This may actually have contributed to greater stress for women who could have felt compelled to stay in a position or face the uncertain prospect of finding another job without credentials.

[132] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Minutes of the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers, May 9, 1956, also see October 18, 1956 May 8, 1957 and May 7, 1959. 82.292C Box 2-5.

[133] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Minutes of the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers, May 7, 1959, 9. 82.292C Box 2-5.

[134] Mae (Walker) Gracey, UCTS student in 1957-58, conversation with Caryn Douglas, March 12, 2004.

Rev. W. Smith, the guest speaker at the 1958 meeting of the Committee challenged them by stating:

> The vital issue at stake is NOT to integrate THE CONTRIBUTION of women into the Church but to integrate WOMEN into the full life of the Church. (emphasis original) [135]

This address suggests that the Committee was struggling with finding its place in the changing expectations of the role for women in the church and the public arena. The cautiousness of the Committee to make change with steps forward that are girdled by restrictive conditions reflects this place of uncertainty and hints at a variance in opinion.

The Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers intended to take revisions of the deaconess constitution to the General Council in 1958. They deferred this action in light of the pending final report of a major Commission[136] reviewing all the work of women in the church. When the Commission reported to the General Council an additional recommendation came from the floor of the meeting:

> that the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers be requested to revise the Constitution of the Deaconess Order with a view to liberalizing its provisions, and that these proposals be submitted [to the next General Council.][137]

Clearly concerns were raised on the floor of the Council, but the details are not recorded in the minutes. In 1960 an amended Constitution, without rules

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[135] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Minutes of the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers, May 8, 1958, 9. 82.292C Box 2-5.

[136] Commission on the Status of Members of the Deaconess Order, Women Workers and other Lay Members Engaged in the Full Time Work of the Church.

[137] The United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings of the 18th General Council, September 1958* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1958), 69.

regarding marriage or age of admission was presented by the Committee and passed by the General Council.[138]

Employment Status

The marriage bar disappeared, but not the act of disjoining, as women continued to be disjoined when they stopped working, even though the church employed married women without any formal status or designation to do church work.

In 1961 Mrs. Pearl (Spencer) Budge, a graduate of the former Methodist school from 1926 and a deaconess until she was married and disjoined in1931, wrote to the Committee requesting reinstatement. The minutes outline that Mrs. Budge served as a "trained woman worker" from 1944 to 1959 in a variety of "church situations." [139] In 1959, she took a position with Bathurst Street United Church in Toronto. The Committee approved her application and granted her reinstatement. This story draws attention to the reality that married women *were* working in the church, including working in positions that could be recognized as deaconess work. Unfortunately these women were less protected, and had less officially advocacy for fair working conditions and adequate remuneration, than their diaconal counterparts. The potential for women workers to be exploited by the church was so real that the Deaconess Constitution had a clause, introduced

[138] The United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings of the 19th General Council, September 1960* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1960), 63.

[139] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. .Minutes of the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers, March 16, 1961, p 5. 82.292C, Box 2-6.

in 1934,[140] but retained in the 1960 revision, requiring that "provision be made for at least one full day's rest in seven".[141] Disjoining women, whether because they married or because they stopped working for the church, meant that if women did subsequently obtain church employment they were even more vulnerable.

The disjoining of Gloria (Kilpatrick) Nettle in 1957 is a very interesting case. Gloria was designated by Maritime Conference in 1955 and went to St. Paul's United Church in Fredericton where she served as Church Secretary/Director of Christian Education until the spring of 1957, when she left for Toronto with plans to be married in the fall. Gloria just knew it was expected that she would resign from the Order. [142] She explains:

> I wrote to Mrs. Campion to see if she knew of any secretarial jobs available in the Toronto area and luckily she was in need of a secretary so I worked for her [143]…I thought, 'wow, I'll still be working for the church,' and since I planned to continue to work for 3 or 5 years or so after we got married I was pretty happy about that.[144]

The minutes of the Committee note "wedding bells will ring … for Gloria Kilpatrick who is resigning from the Order."[145] At the next meeting the Committee "celebrates that the office secretary, Gloria Kirkpatrick, became Mrs. Howard

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[140] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 528. Report of 6th National Conference of the Deaconess Association of The United Church of Canada, Winnipeg, June 26-28, 1934, 11. 90.037C, Box 1-5. The deaconesses pressed for this provision because of "the unnecessary breakdowns in health on the part of some deaconesses recently."

[141] The United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings of the 19th General Council, September 1960* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1960), 208.

[142] Gloria Nettle, email to Caryn Douglas, February 1, 2009.

[143] Gloria Nettle, email to Caryn Douglas, February 1, 2009.

[144] Gloria Nettle, interview by Caryn Douglas, by telephone, February 6, 2009.

[145] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Minutes of the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers, May 8, 1957, 7. 82.292C, Box 2-5.

Nettle. Mrs. Nettle will continue to serve as office secretary."[146] Gloria was not aware that exemptions to the disjoining rule were being granted in 1957. She says:

> It would never have entered my mind to ask if I could be Mrs. Campion's secretary [as a deaconess appointment], and she never suggested it to me. I don't recall discussing the issue of disjoining with her. … she seemed very disappointed when I [later] resigned from working for her.[147]

This story again demonstrates that the church was willing to employee married women but was not eager to have married deaconesses. Tena Campion, was the full time Executive Secretary for the Order for over a decade. She was married, with children, but as a lay woman, was allowed to be employed! It was in this same year, 1957, that the first married woman, Elinor Leard was ordained, but only after significant protest. A last minute telegram from the Moderator of the United Church tried to stop her ordination. His objection did not dissuade the Conference from proceeding. Mrs. Leard's ordination though, prompted the establishment of a church commission "in view of division of opinion in London Conference on the question of the ordination of Mrs. Elinor Katharine Leard, a married woman with three children."[148] The Commission that reported to the General Council in 1962 recommended that married women should not function

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[146] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Minutes of the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers, October 17, 1957, 5. 82.292C, Box 2-5.

[147] Gloria Nettle, interview by Caryn Douglas, by telephone, February 6, 2009.

[148] London Conference of The United Church of Canada, *Digest of Minutes 33rd Annual Conference, June 4-7, 1957,* 13.

as ordained ministers. The General Council did not accept the recommendation.[149]

The marriage bar was replaced with the working bar; women who were not employed in the church were disjoined. In the 1959 letter acknowledging deaconess Dorothy Naylor's appointment to Glad Tidings Mission the minister associated with the Mission wrote to her, "As a matter of interest, I may say that according to present plans, Joyce [the deaconess you are replacing] has her wedding scheduled for July third or fourth. I hope yours won't come too soon, nor yet be delayed too long!"[150] The church was trying to have its cake and eat it too. Its expectations that women would commit to lifelong service *and* that they would be temporary workers were completely incompatible. Women were left trying to navigate a way through the mixed messages.

In December, 1960, Dorothy announced her engagement. She wrote to the Board of Home Missions staff, "I can imagine that by now the Board must consider Glad Tidings a dangerous place to send single women workers!"[151] Dorothy continued to serve the Mission as a deaconess for a year after marriage and then left the employ of the church as she and her ordained husband moved for his graduate education to the United States. She recalls, "I always said that

[149] Charlotte Caron, "A Look at Ministry: Diversity and Ambiguity" in *A Pilgrimage in Progress: A History of The United Church of Canada* ed. Don Schweitzer (forthcoming).
[150] Letter to Miss Dorothy Naylor from Reverend Allison Fraser, April 8, 1959.
[151] Letter to D. M. C. MacDonald, from Dorothy Naylor, April 3, 1961.

being married was not the issue in my case - it was about not working."[152] When she left the Mission, her status as a deaconess was revoked.

In 1962, Yvonne (Clipperton) (Vanslyke) Wilke was disjoined from the Deaconess Order. Yvonne did not know in 1961, when she became engaged to marry Jim Vanslyke, a candidate for ordained ministry, that the marriage bar had been removed. She assumed that she would have to resign once she married. Mentors advised her to become a deaconess, even if only for one year, reasoning that down the road it might be possible for married women to work and it would be easier to be reinstated than to have to undergo the admission process from the beginning. Yvonne took that advice and was designated. A year later, and one month before her wedding, just after she had resigned from her congregational position, she received a letter from Tena Campion, asking for her resignation and the return of the deaconess pin. Like many other women, she never returned the pin, but she did forward her resignation. Only in recent years has Yvonne come to know that she was disjoined because she was not working, not because she married. In the culture of the times those two acts were closely intertwined. Yvonne noted, "I don't think we understood what was happening, that we made the distinction, and it was just expected that the minister's wife, in the small town where Jim was settled, would not work."[153] After Jim's placement in a more isolated part of Manitoba, Yvonne learned that the committee had been influenced to settle him there because they perceived a need for Christian

[152] Dorothy Naylor, email to Caryn Douglas, July 2, 2005.

[153] Yvonne Wilke, email to Caryn Douglas, April 24, 2006; interview by Caryn Douglas, by telephone, January 20, 2009.

education leadership and they just assumed Yvonne would provide that. While one arm of the church was revoking her status and credentials, another was expecting her to act in a professional capacity, but without status or pay.

Even after 1960 disjoining continued to be evoked in some situations where women had married and *not* because they had stopped working. Oriole (Vane) Veldhuis and Rosalene (Bostwick) Sallmen both graduated from the Training School in 1961. Rosalene had an offer of a position and an offer of marriage and she was able to accept both offers, got married and was designated a deaconess. Oriole was also engaged, with plans to marry two years later. She was designated and served for two years in Ontario. She resigned that position and returned to Winnipeg to marry in 1963 and to a deaconess position in a Winnipeg congregation. In the spring she learned that her name had been removed from the Deaconess Order by the Ontario presbytery because she left to marry. The ordained minister from the congregation "went to bat" for her and her name was restored to the list.[154]

Sometimes ordained ministers, who hired and supervised deaconesses in this time period, were the ones who seemed to make the decisions about the deaconess's status. Wilma (Unwin) Cade was disjoined in 1964. Wilma graduated from the United Church Training School in 1960, was designated a deaconess, and took up her first placement in Ontario where she met Peter, whom she married three years later. Wilma remembers,

[154] Oriole Veldhuis, personal correspondence to Caryn Douglas, August 18, 2003.

> [the ordained minister in the congregation where I worked] explained to me that the church really didn't think that women should carry on after they were married. I did carry on for a year, at least he said that was alright, so I did carry on for a year.[155]

Then Wilma lost her job and her status.

Disjoining as Deaconess Order Oversight Decentralized

In 1964 deaconesses became ex officio members of Presbytery and were allowed to serve on regional and national committees. The Committee on Deaconesses and Women Workers was dissolved in 1962. An Interim Committee on the Deaconess Order continued, as did the position of Executive Secretary held by Tena Campion until 1964[156] when the courts of the church, Presbytery, Conference and General Council, assumed full responsibility for "receiving, supervising, designating and settlement of women candidates for work in the Church."[157] During this period of confusion many questions about how, and by whom, deaconesses would be regulated remained unanswered and unresolved. This uncertainty contributed to the inconsistency in how the women were treated. For example, in the fall of 1964, Toronto Conference wrote to the General Secretary of the United Church to ask for clarification on what to do in the case of "Mrs. John Sallmen (Rosalene)" who had made a request to the presbytery to resign from the Deaconess Order. The General Secretary consulted the chair of the former Interim Committee on the Deaconess Order,

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[155] Wilma Cade, group interview with Caryn Douglas, Toronto, April 30, 2006.

[156] The United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings of the 22nd General Council, September 1964* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1964), 170.

[157] The United Church of Canada, *Proceedings of the 22nd General Council,* 169.

who explained that it was up to each presbytery to take action.[158] The expectation that deaconesses should be single was well entrenched. Awareness of the change in the rule was limited within the church structure. It was limited even among deaconesses curtailing their educational and advocacy role. Ordained ministers were accustomed to setting the working conditions for the deaconesses that they hired and supervised. With nearly 100 presbyteries and no national body to provide education or advocacy, deaconesses were in a vulnerable position.

The last woman, I believe, to be officially disjoined by the United Church because she married was Joan (Davies) Sandy. She was disjoined in 1968. Joan graduated from the United Church Training School in 1961 and was designated a deaconess and appointed by the Woman's Missionary Society to serve as a missionary on a pastoral charge in northern Saskatchewan. When the WMS was integrated into the official structures of the United Church in 1962 through its Board of Women, Joan was transferred to the Board of Home Missions. During a furlough leave in 1967 she met with the staff from the Board. She mentioned she was to be married in the coming summer. She returned home to a letter informing her that since her appointment had been made under the WMS their rules governed her employment, and, since the WMS did not employ married women, upon her marriage, she would be required to leave the position she had

[158] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Letter from Richard Kendall, Secretary Toronto Centre Presbytery to Ernest Long, Secretary of the General Council, November 17, 1964, Letter from Ernest Long to Rev. Frank Brisbin, (Chair of former Interim Committee on the Deaconess Order) n.d. Letter from Frank Brisbin to Ernest Long, November 27, 1964. 82.292C Box 7-6.

filled for seven years. Further, she was obligated to pass back her pin and was resigned from the Deaconess Order. This action was justified by the same explanation as her firing, even though the WMS would never have administered the rules of the Order; they were distinctly separate entities. Joan was never certain who made the decision to fire and disjoin her, but it seemed to her that it was the decision of perhaps just one person. The lack of oversight for the Order contributed to enabling this injustice to be carried out. Joan recalled that she was angry at the time, but she was about to marry a farmer and was hoping to have a family and dedicate herself to parenting, so she accepted the decision. In the 1980s she applied and regained her status as a Diaconal Minister.[159]

It is difficult to document the end of the practice of disjoining because the situation for deaconesses was unclear for decades. Between the 1960s and the 1980s rules were applied with considerable variance. As early as 1968 some women were retained in the order even though they were not working,[160] but others, into the late 1970s, were denied reinstatement because they did not have employment. In the absence of national policies, rules could be created and applied randomly and inconsistently. Clarity is finally reached in the 1980s, when diaconal ministry is recognized as a stream of ordered ministry. It becomes a lifelong vocation regardless of employment status.

[159] Joan Sandy, interview by Caryn Douglas, by telephone, February 17, 2003.
[160] Verna McKay, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Winnipeg, March 5, 2006.

Deaconesses Seeking Reinstatement

The Deaconess Constitution always contained a clause allowing for the reinstatement of women, if their application was accepted. In the 1960 Constitution it was clear that at readmission deaconesses did not have to be re-designated. Very few women however, sought reinstatement after the marriage bar was lifted. Some report that they did not really know it was possible, until a point at which they felt it was too late.[161] For some the experience of trying to gain reinstatement was painful.

Wilma Cade, who had been disjoined in 1964, became a Director of Christian Education in a congregation in the late 1970s. When the congregation experienced financial difficulties Wilma was let go. As she recalls, "it was explained to me that if I had been a deaconess they would not have been able to so summarily get rid of me." She returned to volunteer work and to gain more security Wilma decided to seek reinstatement to the Deaconess Order. She applied to Toronto Conference, but as Wilma explained:

> …they were very formal about it and said they didn't reinstate people unless they had a salary, a position in the church, so doing all this work for free didn't qualify, so … while I had time to jump through the hoops … the church wouldn't have me because I wasn't being paid.[162]

Past its official end, the legacy of the disjoining continued to affect the manner in which deaconesses were treated, and even their own decisions. Carol Stevenson Seller was designated a deaconess in 1965 and began her ministry in

[161] Joyce Scott, interview by Caryn Douglas, Sydney, BC, February 27, 2006.
[162] Wilma Cade, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Toronto, April 30, 2006.

a larger parish in Saskatchewan. In 1968 she married Frederick Seller, an ordained United Church minister. Carol was not disjoined. They decided to travel for a year, and include some study. Carol remembers:

> When we went to the national church to inquire about financial assistance for study, I was unable to get any because, in its wisdom, the church decided I wouldn't make good use of the money since I was married. Thus, we had to share Frederick's bursary. I was furious.[163]

When they returned to Canada Carol was allowed to retain her diaconal status, even though she voluntarily stayed out of the workforce, while Frederick took a ministry position. Carol recalls:

> I wasn't prepared for the shock of marriage when we went to our first pastoral charge...looking back both Frederick and I wished we had asked to share one position, but we did not. It just didn't come to a conscious option as I/we were both assuming very traditional male/female roles. Instead I became a volunteer and was recognized by most as the minister's wife, although I did develop women friendships and was appreciated by them in my own right.[164]

Disjoining also played a significant role in sustaining a patriarchal view in which men were superior. Later in the 1970s when Carol's feminist consciousness was being raised, she still deferred her own vocational fulfillment for that of her husband. In 1980, she was hired into a half time position as the deaconess in a team with Frederick who was full time. There was no official bar but the discrimination against her as a deaconess was still apparent.

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[163] Carol Stevenson Seller, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Toronto, September 24, 2007.

[164] Carol Stevenson Seller, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Toronto, September 24, 2007.

> I was diaconal, and therefore considered by some to not be the 'real minister' and I worked more behind the scenes doing the leadership training things, and therefore was less visible, [and taken less seriously], and … people [were always] deferring to Frederick, because he was the man.[165]

In 1982 the gender neutral term diaconal minister was adopted and diaconal ministers become members of the Order of Ministry through an act called commissioning. With this change, diaconal ministry became a lifelong vocation, equal to, but different from ordained ministry. This new understanding enabled diaconal ministers to be more readily integrated into the regular court system and *The United Church Manual* regulations. In 1984, a national Committee on Diaconal Ministry was established on which diaconal ministers held a majority membership. It was mandated to advocate for diaconal ministers and to educate the church about the diaconate. That committee was eliminated in a reorganization of national administrative structures in 1999.[166] Currently, responsibility for the support, development and advocacy for diaconal ministry is broadly dispersed throughout the committee and staff structure of the church, and not identified as a priority anywhere and as a result gets little attention.

Some Effects of Disjoining

In the Deaconess Order, disjoining was the elephant in the room that no one talked about, at least not in public.[167] Its power was ubiquitous and effective.

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[165] Carol Stevenson Seller, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Toronto, September 24, 2007.

[166] Gwyn Griffith, *Weaving a Changing Tapestry*, Appendix on Diaconal Ministry.

[167] Dorothy Naylor, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Toronto, September 24, 2007.

The deaconess marriage bar was extreme, inflicting a double loss of job and credential.

Disjoining excluded women from a community, from the "family." Dorothy Naylor, a United Church Training School student in 1958 tells a story about the first year students arriving to dinner, each wearing a sparkling ring from Woolworth's on her left hand. The principal congratulated each one on her engagement. Dorothy explains:

> [It] was kind of a joke...we thought that whenever one of the students was going to be married, that would be considered by the staff as a really bad thing…We never heard a staff person [say] 'Now we want to discourage you from being married because the church needs you,' but in our minds, the staff – the mothers – would not want [us to get married].[168]

The rupture from community was painful for many of the women, both those who were disjoined and those who remained behind. Jean Angus, who was a deaconess from 1953 until she was ordained in 1977 expressed this loss.

> There were mixed feelings about the girls who got married, like they were jumping ship. At the [annual Deaconess Order] meetings you would hear the news of who was getting married and you would think, just a bit, what a waste of their training … the old girls like me were left, we had each other.[169]

This pattern of clearly demarcating who was in, and out, affected and shaped the experience that deaconesses had. Disjoining contributed to the fragmentation of an already small community of women in church vocations.

Disjoining bolstered two other rules that sustained unhelpful public images

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Verna McKay, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Winnipeg, March 5, 2006. Ruth Lang, interview by Caryn Douglas, Oakville, ON, January 12, 2006.

[168] Gwyn Griffith, *Weaving a Changing Tapestry*.

[169] Jean Angus, interview by Caryn Douglas, February 25, 2006.

of deaconesses. One rule limited entry into the Order to women between 23 and 35. The image of a deaconess as a young woman, just waiting for her man was strong. Older deaconesses, particularly those who served in Canada, were viewed as women who had failed to attain the real vocation of wife. Even young deaconesses expressed this negative view. One deaconess who had graduated in the 1960s commented that she was uncomfortable using the title " 'deaconess' … which smacked of 'old maiden aunts in black stockings.' "[170] Half of the women designated deaconesses remained in the service of the church for their entire working lives[171] but the popular view beheld a temporary staging ground for marriage.

The other rule mandated year by year appointments for deaconesses in congregations. It ensured deaconesses were temporary workers. This practice further eroded their job security and effectively hampered any voicing of discontent about working conditions.

The continual removal of women from the membership kept the Order small, lessening its political clout and advocacy capacity. The movements to gain security by integrating the Order more fully into the church structure, for example by obtaining presbytery membership, were continually defeated.

Official church lists of deaconesses do not reflect the number of trained women who had a call to ministry affirmed by the church. But the church made is expectations that disjoined deaconesses should dedicate themselves to church

[170] Kathleen Heuer, "Calling or Co-optation?: Revisioning Ministry in The United Church of Canada" (D.Min diss., St. Stephen's College, Edmonton, 1999) Chapter 5, p 9.
[171] Mary Anne MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens," 32.

work as trained volunteers explicit. Most of them complied.[172]

The blurring of the lines between paid and volunteer work further eroded the respect for the diaconate. This blurring contributed to the view that diaconal ministry, especially the work of Christian Education, was something that could be done by any one. It did not require professionals. Women's work was diminished, especially in comparison to men's work. Vigorous arguments for shortening the program for deaconess preparation and for lowering the standards for admission were frequent. Congregations were discouraged from investing in training and support for deaconesses and their ministries.

Disjoining contributed to making women invisible. Throughout history women have disturbingly, but commonly, remained nameless. A record of disjoined women does not exist. There is no list or file of those affected. A careful search through archival records and reports could produce a partial list. But the archival material has gaps and the records are inconsistent. Only rarely mentioned is the woman's new family name, adding to the difficulty of locating her now.[173] Even the WMS, which kept excellent records, did not identify which of

[172] An astounding number of women were disjoined (or never joined up) because they married ordained men and became clergy wives. There is no record on the actual numbers but I estimate it to be 15% of students There were approximately 425 graduates from the Training School between 1943 and 1963 and I can identify 61 of these women who married clergy. I do not know the story of all of the graduates, so there may be others. The United Church Training School was also known as "The Clergy Reserves", the place that ordained candidates could go in search of a wife.

[173] The closest is the work done by Gwyn Griffith in her forthcoming history of the Centre for Christian Studies, *Weaving a Changing Tapestry*. The archival records unearthed many inconsistencies in the names of students and their actual graduation status. A list of all those who can be identified as graduates is an appendix in the book. All graduates were affected in some regard by the rule, but it is not possible from this record to determine who was actually disjoined.

its women workers were deaconesses.[174] From my knowledge of the Centre for Christian Studies graduate community I would estimate that of the women who were either disjoined by the Order, dismissed by the WMS, or who made the decision to marry rather than to become a deaconess or WMS worker, sixty are still living.[175]

Conclusion

Deaconesses in the United Church had a strong vocation to serve the world and the church. They responded to the call of God's by giving of themselves, and by making the most of the opportunities the church provided for their ministry. The institutional church, though, consistently narrowed those opportunities through the disjoining practice. It theologized and embodied perspectives that limited women's choices and had negative consequences in their lives. Resistance to change and the vestiges of its attitudes and practices were hard to dislodge. In the early decades of the 20th century the church mirrored social expectations in which no objection to practices like disjoining was raised. But by the 1950s and 60s the culture was shifting, including the church culture, and the practice was critiqued. Individual women paid a very high price in the period for the church's intransigence. So much potential, for the church, for the women and for the gospel, was lost.

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[174] Mary Anne MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens," 24.

[175] This number does not take into consideration those who withdrew part way through their training because of a decision to marry, or those who never went to the school at all because they were married or were planning to marry, or those who denied themselves a married relationship in favour of their vocation to service.

Chapter 4

THE AMBIGUOUS CONTEXT FOR DISCONTENT

I was born as the decade of the 1950s was rolling into the 60s. My actual memory of the era is sparse yet I have vivid pictures of it in my imagination, thanks to the stories told to me by deaconesses who lived in these times. In the post war heyday of “bursting at the seams” Sunday schools, full time enrolment in the deaconess program peaked.[176] The demand for deaconesses was insatiable. In 1952, all but 230 United Church pastoral charges[177] contributed to the United Church Training School building fund.[178] Awareness of the work of deaconesses was never greater.

It is in this context that the disjoining of United Church deaconesses finally comes into question within the church structures. Roles for women in the church were being scrutinized worldwide. Formalized protests against marriage bars appear shortly after they are established in the early 1900s, but it is in this period when the bars are officially removed.[179] Slowly, and not without resistance, change was happening.

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[176] Gwyn Griffith, *Weaving a Changing Tapestry* (Winnipeg: The Centre for Christian Studies: Forthcoming, 2009).

[177] A pastoral charge is a grouping of several congregations. There were nearly 2000 pastoral charges in 1952. Gwyn Griffith, *Weaving a Changing Tapestry*.

[178] United Church Training School, *60th Anniversary 1895 to 1955* (Toronto: United Church Training School, 1955), 2.

[179] Claudia Goldin, "Marriage bars: Discrimination Against Married Women Workers, 1920 -1950s," Working Paper No. 2747 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research Working Papers, October 1988), 17. The United Methodist Church bar is removed in 1959, for example. Mary Agnes Dougherty, *My Calling to Fulfill: Deaconesses in the United Methodist Tradition* (New York: Women's Division, General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist

I am continually shocked at the amount of misogyny in main stream Canadian culture in the 1950s and 60s. Prejudicial attitudes and institutionalized discrimination against women were widely acceptable. The United Church displays complicity in this behaviour. I am equally amazed to find mainstream institutions articulating alternative views that name and condemn attitudes and behaviours that discriminated against women.[180] The United Church is a participant in this phenomenon too.

The stories that the disjoined women tell attempt to make sense of their experience in the ambiguity of this era. Story is what we have to weave together a reality that enables us to live. To weave the United Church's story of disjoining and the apology, understanding this era is important.

The decade from the mid 50s to 60s was a prolific one for the United Church. Numerous commissions and special studies were undertaken on several social and ecclesiological issues as the church was struggling to determine official church stances in these changing times. The role of women in church and society captured much attention.[181]

Church, 1997), 230. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada the bar was in place until 1969. Married candidates were not accepted until 1976. Sister Ginger Patchen, email to Caryn Douglas, January 14, 2009.

[180] For example, Commission on Life and Work of Women in the Church, World Council of Churches, "Life and Work of Women in the Church," *Ecumenical Review*, 5 No 2, (January 1953), 160.

[181] Questions about the role of women in relationship, and the implicit concerns about their expression of sexuality, have engaged the inquiry of the United Church since its inception. The range of General Council Commissions prior to this era alone is astounding: 1932 The Meaning and Responsibility of Christian Marriage, 1936 Report of the Commission on Voluntary Parenthood and Sterilization, 1946 Report on the Commission on Christian Marriage and Christian Home, 1948 and 1950 Marriage of Divorced Persons, 1956, 1960 and 1962 Commission on Christian Marriage and Divorce.

Official church documents of the period reveal the ambiguity in the church's position. There are glimmers of liberation from the established paradigms of women's subservient position, and moments of courageous thought and practice, but there were still very strong vestiges of patriarchal norms.

For the deaconess community, these patriarchal norms were perhaps best illustrated in the trivializing image of "The Angel Factory" which was deeply linked to the United Church Training School/Covenant College and even the Centre for Christian Studies.[182] Diaconal students were characterized as angels. The image appears as early as 1908 but finds its fullest expression mid century. Gwyn Griffith points out that, "A *factory* implies a standard production line, where everyone is shaped in the same way."[183] Deaconesses were not seen as individuals but were commodified into a packaged image that was cute. Helene Hannah, a diaconal student in the 1950s said, "[The image was about] gentle Jesus pure and mild kind of people, syrupy, flapping around…not knowing what they were about. I don't remember having any sense of biblical angels with messages."[184] The patriarchal norms of the era blanketed everyone. The women themselves incorporated the image, it is playfully used in student year books and addresses by the school staff. It was some years before the sexism inherent in the label became evident to those to whom it was applied.

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[182] In 1986 when I was preparing to attend CCS as a student I received a card from a well meaning lay member of the church. The card pictured an angel and included good wishes for my transformation at the factory. The Anglican Women's Training College was also known as the Angel Factory.

[183] Gwyn Griffith, *Weaving a Changing Tapestry*.

[184] Helene Hannah, a student at the Anglican Women's Training College, quoted in Gwyn Griffith, *Weaving a Changing Tapestry* (Forthcoming, 2009).

Evident in the United Church's view on vocation and marriage is what historian Mary Kinnear calls, "fossilized assumptions about women that date back to a pre-industrial economy."[185] The 1963 report of the Commission on the Gainful Employment of Married Women provides a window on what the United Church was thinking at this time.[186] The report identifies concerns about the philosophical and theological limitations imposed on women. It names some of the tensions in the church. It is not able though, to integrate the insights fully into the church's doctrine, theology or practice. It is guilty of ignoring sexism that it demonstrates it is aware of and continues to embody theological concepts which undermine the full equality of women.

Following upon a major study of marriage and divorce[187], the United Church established a Commission in 1961 to facilitate "urgently needed social action to enable women to carry their responsibilities both at home and at work without detriment to their own health and welfare or that of their families, particularly their children."[188] Foundational to the report is the premise that women carry primary responsibility for domestic maintenance despite liberal theological interpretations of scripture about women that declare the "Earthly Eve

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[185] Mary Kinnear, *In Subordination Professional Women 1870 - 1970* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1995), 9. Kinnear does not cite the United Church specifically in this reference. Her critique is of the Christianized social character of Canada. The United Church would claim responsibility for helping to shape that character.

[186] Commission on the Gainful Employment of Married Women, *Married women working : report of the Commission on the Gainful Employment of Married Women* (Toronto, United Church of Canada, 1963).

[187] Commission on Christian Marriage and Divorce, *Toward a Christian Understanding of Sex Love Marriage.* (Toronto: Board of Christian Education of The United Church of Canada, 1960). This Commission began its work in 1956.

[188] Commission on the Gainful Employment, *Married Women Working*, 3.

or Divine Madonna [leave] little place in the picture for the female *person.*"[189] Recommendations focus on the need for society to ensure adequate support "for working wives" including affordable daycare, higher minimum wage for women and equal pay for equal work. Underlying sexist views become explicit in the conclusions. Responsibility for the societal inequality and disruption is laid on women, who "have a 'guilt feeling' about working which seems to be an emotional rather than a logical reaction … [and] have a dilemma because they feel called to be wife and person."[190] The degree to which women are held responsible for family elucidates the level of pressure women were under when faced with decisions about vocation. A woman who broke out of the "puppet characteristics of husband and wife"[191] advocated for by the report, would not only have faced mixed responses to her actions, she would have been blamed for feeling confused about the mixed messages the church was delivering!

Deaconesses in this era clearly name how difficult it was to live and work within the church's ambiguity. At the 1963 Conference of the Deaconess Association a lively discussion was had about the roles of women in the church. Strong statements describe the mixed messages: women's leadership is desired throughout the church but women's place is limited, often to the Sunday School and women's work. "The point was brought up that often movement within the church seems to be in two contradictory directions regarding women."[192]

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[189] Commission on the Gainful Employment, *Married Women Working*, 13.
[190] Commission on the Gainful Employment, *Married Women Working*, 25.
[191] Commission on the Gainful Employment, *Married Women Working,* 25.
[192] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 528. Minutes of the 19th

Despite the fact that the entire deaconess movement was predicated on attracting young, single women into the profession, and dismissing older ones, disjoined deaconess Wilma Cade noted that the church was very uncomfortable with young, single deaconesses. “It was dreadful being a single woman in the church ... people would come up to me on the street and say ‘we do so hope you'll meet some nice young man.’ ”[193] This concern over unattached women further erodes the status of deaconesses throughout the period of transition away from the explicit marriage bars, so ironically, it results in discouraging women from considering the option of remaining single and devoting themselves to a vocation in the church.

Tears welled up for Dorothy Naylor as she spoke about the single women at the United Church Training School who had been important mentors for her as a student in the late 1950s. “I learned very early that single women could live very full lives, and have fun too! But at the same time there was this aura, the Clergy Reserves, the 3rd year rush,[194] and of course the Angel Factory.”[195] When Dorothy was asked later why this remembrance brought tears, she teared up again and said:

> It has to do with the profundity of their lives, [single women] like [Principal] Harriet Christie, they always impressed me … I guess I wanted to see them more respected, that single was a good choice. There was so much in the church that said otherwise.[196]

Conference of the Deaconess Association/10th Conference of the Fellowship of Professional Women, 1963, 9. 98.101C, Box 12-12.

[193] Wilma Cade, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Toronto, April 30, 2006..

[194] The Training School was seen as a source of clergy wives for the male seminary students, especially in their final year before ordination.

[195] Dorothy Naylor, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Toronto, September 24, 2007.

[196] Dorothy Naylor, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Toronto, September 24, 2007.

The report from The Gainful Employment of Married Women commission, does not mention the idea that wife and mother is, or ever was, considered a vocation for women, although the idea is carried implicitly. Interestingly, while the title of the study is “Married Women”, throughout the report the expression, “working wives” is used, revealing the deeply bound view that a woman’s identity is subsumed into her vocation as wife. The silence is truly perplexing given how explicitly the idea of a church vocation being limited to single women is in other church materials, such as this 1961 United Church *Observer* editorial:

> The ambition of a normal Christian girl is to get a good education, work for a while, get married and rear a family. And that is a high calling. Some of the best of them want professional, full-time, life-long service in the church. For them we thank God. Others will find marriage passes them by, and they want to make life count for the highest possible good. … But among the tens of thousands of young women coming out of our high schools and churches, there are many who could make an excellent contribution for a few years – like young public school teachers. And after marriage they could continue to be of great help in their local churches.[197]

Sparked by letters in response that were critical, *The Observer* ran a second editorial, making their position crystal clear: “that God’s highest calling for a woman is still to be a wife and mother.”[198]

There is complete silence about married women in the church's employ in The Gainful Employment of Married Women report. None of its recommendations are directed to the church even though in 1963 there were 147 active

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[197] “Needed – A Short Course,” *The United Church Observer* (April 1, 1961), 6, quoted in Mary Anne MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens,”105.

[198] “Needed: Girl and Man Fridays,” *The United Church Observer*, (July 1961), 7, quoted in Mary Anne MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens”, 105.

deaconesses, some of whom were married and about 30 ordained women,[199] at least one of whom was married, not to mention hundreds of church secretaries and other clerical and support staff. Perhaps these women were invisible to the Commission. Perhaps the commissioners were unaware of the prevalence of the theology limiting women to one vocation at a time. Given its coverage in contemporary issues of *The Observer*, however, this would be unlikely. The church missed an opportunity in this report to address its own treatment of working women, but took the opportunity through a simultaneous Commission, on ordination, which also reported to the General Council in 1962.

The Commission on Ordination was set up in response to a direct question to the General Council in 1958 about whether a woman could carry out a church vocation *and* be a wife and mother. Its recommendations were even more limiting and discriminatory than the silence of the Employment of Married Women report. The report recommended that ordination only be for "those women who are unmarried or widows, and therefore not under the call of wifehood or motherhood."[200] General Council sent the recommendations from the report related to married women and ordination to the General Council Executive (GCE) for further study.[201] The 1964 General Council concurred with the advice of the GCE and passed a motion removing all of the referred

[199] Mary Anne MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens," 129.

[200] Charlotte Caron, "A Look at Ministry: Diversity and Ambiguity" in *A Pilgrimage in Progress: A History of The United Church of Canada* ed. Don Schweitzer (forthcoming). In 1934 when the General Council tested the will of the whole church on approving ordination for women, the question that was asked was, "Do you approve the ordination of women?" There was no testing of the limitations of that approval related to married status.

[201] The United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings 20th General Council September, 1962, London, ON* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1962), 80.

recommendations from the report and in essence removed any official marriage bar regarding ordination.[202] Many other obstacles remained though to the full and equal acceptance of married ordained women. The church was actively discriminating against women as employees, yet ignored this reality in its own investigations and reporting. The prevalent focus for the church was on directing change in the world beyond itself.

This commitment to be active in the broader politic was encouraged by Canadian society receptivity. The Gainful Employment of Married Women report, for example, has a foreword written by a senior official from the federal Department of Labour. The United Church possessed significant influence. The positions of the church, and its actions, both paralleled and challenged those of the culture. The church must be accountable for how it used its power to effect change in culture and practice.

One of the most influential reports of this era came from the Commission on Life and Work of Women in the Church (1952), a commission of the World Council of Churches. It is cited in many of the reports produced by the United Church. The report states:

> The bearing of responsibility being of the very essence of true human existence the Church should not withhold this from women in any realm, but open up opportunities for women to grow in responsible living.[203]

On record, the United Church conceptually affirmed women's full participation,

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[202] The United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings 21st General Council Sept 9-17, 1964, St. John's, NFLD* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1964), 42, 81.

[203] Commission on Life and Work of Women in the Church, World Council of Churches, "Life and Work of Women in the Church," *Ecumenical Review*, 5 No 2, (January 1953), 160.

but was passive in opening up viable avenues for truly equal participation. Sexism pervaded the culture, of the church and the society, but voices of critique were available. The United Church was slow in taking the opportunity to live out the biblical proclamation “there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)

The ambiguity of these times complicates the apology to disjoined women. Does the church have anything to apologize for? Can it be held responsible for having attitudes and practices that were acceptable at the time? The disjoined women are at variance in their opinion on this issue. But when the church made its apology to the women it disjoined there was no reflection on this history. No taking account of the pattern of systemic resistance that delayed change. No analysis of how that delay affected many women’s stories. And no exploration of the insight it had about discrimination. The church lost the opportunity to learn through this reflection and apply it to its attitudes and behaviours today.

Chapter 5

A THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR APOLOGY

Apology is a paradox. An apology can neither undo wrongs that have been done nor eliminate the harmful effects of the wrong. And yet confessing can change a situation; offering a statement of regret can transform a relationship. Apology constitutes an essential and fundamental aspect of human social connection. Universally, people, as individuals and communities, make mistakes. When they come to realize the error in their ways, responsibility and maturity demand an honest and open disclosure of this discovery. Apology can be a social and economic device for restoring and sustaining the relationships needed for groups to survive and move forward.

The United Church is no stranger to apology. It has apologized at least five times, including the apology to disjoined women. The first one was in August 1982 to Rev. Dr. James Endicott, a missionary in China, for denouncing him as a heretic in the 1950's because of his support for Mao Zedong and the Chinese Revolution.[204]

By far however, the most denominationally shaping apology that the United Church has made was that given to native[205] Canadians at the Sudbury General Council in 1986.[206] Moderator Bob Smith spoke the words on behalf of

[204] Wikipedia, "James Gareth Endicott," http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Gareth_Endicott, (accessed July 8, 2007).

[205] The peoples that Europeans named Indian now most commonly name themselves one of these three terms: Native, First Nations, or Aboriginal.

[206] This apology of the church is very different from the disjoined apology. A comparative

the church, "... We did not hear you when you shared your vision. In our zeal to tell you of the good news of Jesus Christ we were closed to the value of your spirituality ... We ask you to forgive us and to walk together with us in the Spirit of Christ so that our peoples may be blessed and God's creation healed."[207] The Native people responded by acknowledging the apology. Before accepting it, they advised the church they would await signs of true repentance and reconciliation. Acceptance has yet to be extended.[208] By what measure could this apology be assessed for success? Change resulted but is it the change that was desired? What goal is apology to achieve?

The process of apology has the potential to lead to an experience of profound rebirth, conversion, or what is theologically termed, metanoia. This theological component of apology touches the profound connection with the sacred one, the loving holiness at the centre of the universe. This experience of conversion is a characteristic of salvation as Jesus proclaimed it.

The practical sequence of apology encompasses mistake made, fault realized, guilt confessed, regret acknowledged, forgiveness extended, restitution

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examination would make for an insightful investigation. I believe, while deserving of significant critique, there is a process that is attempting to move the church toward conversion. See Bruce Gregersen, "Dialogue at the boundaries: an exploration of the Native Apology (1986) and its relationship to an understanding of mission within The United Church of Canada," (DMin, diss. Emmanuel College, Toronto School of Theology, 1999) and Nicholas Tavuchis, Mea Culpa *A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

[207] United Church of Canada, "Apology to First Nations People 1986," http://www.united-church.ca/beliefs/policies/1986/a651, (accessed November 11, 2006).

[208] In 1997, at the Camrose General Council, the church gave a partner apology for its compliance in the residential schools system that "has tragically resulted in pain and suffering and injustice for many." This apology was given against advice from the church's lawyers who cited possible legal responsibilities ensuing from the implication that an apology admitted wrongdoing. Dean Slater, "Twenty Years beyond the Apology," *Mandate The United Church of Canada's Mission Magazine,* Vol. 36, No 2, Special Edition, (May 2005), 9.

enacted. Spiritually apology engages the deeper fundamentals of what it means to be limited, finite humans in association with others.

Authentic apology goes beyond the mere words, “I am sorry”, or, “We are sorry”. A full apology involves lament, repentance, forgiveness, grace, transformation and restoration of right relationship. Genuine apology entails a dynamic process, a process of reckoning wrongs.[209] This process cannot be restricted to a rigid, linear, step-by-step check list. In fact the process requires an openness and flexibility. I envision apology as a spider web, with strands crisscrossing: no obvious start or finish. The complex intricacy of the web has strength and purpose. So too does the process of reckoning wrongs.

A Framework for Reckoning Wrong

I have developed a framework for examining an apology.[210] It names and explores the components of a reckoning process. The components are not exactly steps or stages because, as described above, the process is not linear. The components are not discrete, the edges of one run into the other.

[209] I am indebted to David Crocker and Trudy Govier for the term reckoning wrong. The term apology is problematic because it is used to refer to the expression of regret aspect of the process. I am however, not entirely satisfied with reckoning wrongs which could be critiqued to be too results oriented.

[210] The framework was influenced by the work of David Crocker, Senior Research Scholar at the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy and the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland. In his article, “Reckoning with Past Wrongs” he asks how should “success” be conceived in reckoning wrongs. He presents a framework of moral goals that are imperative if a reckoning process is to be successful. They are: Truth, Platform for Victims, Accountability and Punishment, Rule of Law, Compensation to Victims, Institutional Reform and Long-term Development, Reconciliation, and, Public Deliberation. He is working on a book with the working title *Reckoning with Past Wrongs: Ends, Means, and Cases.* David Crocker, "Reckoning With Past Wrongs: A Normative Framework," in Carol Prager and Trudy Govier, ed. *Dilemmas of Reconciliation Cases and Concepts* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2003).

Nevertheless, patterns emerge in the framework which offer distinction and suggest progression.

Eight components comprise this framework: lament (recognizing that something is wrong); call (inviting a response); truthing (learning from the story); confession (acknowledging wrong); forgiveness (restoring relationship); reconciliation (concretely marking a new relationship); gospel (expressing good news); and, metanoia (embodying change).

This framework provides a structure to examine the experience of apology. I contend that all these aspects are necessary in attaining a just resolution. The goal of addressing injustice must include, at one and the same time, the journey toward *and* the attainment of metanoia.

Lament

The deep scriptural tradition of lamentation has historically been employed to cry out and signal that something is wrong. Lament surpasses grief and regret. Lament identifies and responds to injustice, expressing deep sorrow and often anger. Public lament can be the first key step in addressing wrong.[211]

Lament embodies the act of questioning the injustice of it all, especially in the face of injustice which is so tenacious or insidious that it seems overwhelming. Scripture assures us that “Blessed are those who weep and are in

[211] See Anne Duncan and Irene Rainey, "Reclaiming Lament: a model for engaging the human spirit in journeying toward transformation, healing and justice-making," (MTS Diaconal Ministry thesis, St. Stephen's College, Edmonton, 2002) for reflection on lament from the perspective of two diaconal ministers.

emotional turmoil; they shall be returned from their wanderings." (Matthew 5:4, Aramaic rendering)[212] It can be hard to keep faith in that prediction. Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann concludes that when lament is lost, minimized or forgotten one tool to redress power imbalance is silenced and the status quo is maintained. [213] He observes that in the silencing, the petitioner becomes either voiceless or is left to utter thanks and praise, the only alternative. When this happens the covenant of community becomes the celebration of joy and well-being exclusively, not the work for justice and release.

Lamentation signals that a conversion is required. Where there is true lamentation, metanoia is needed.

In a reckoning process, lamentation for the offender must be anamnestic. The offender must be moved to the point of truly knowing the lament of the offended. They must be able to recognize the lament of the other as their own.

Call

Call is an idea easily named in the church but elusive to describe. Stories of call reveal its complexities: it can be a compulsion, an inner knowing, a surety that results in a determination to find fulfillment regardless of the costs. Call is infused with the will of God. Its recognition requires a spiritual discernment. Call comes from deep within an individual but its validity is tested in community. As

[212] Mark Hathaway, "Overcoming Paralysis, Healing the Earth" in Joe Mihevc, ed., *Sacred Earth, Sacred Community: Jubilee, Ecology & Aboriginal Peoples* (Toronto: Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative, 2000), 168.

[213] Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press,1995), 4.

call finds acceptance in a community, it can lead the community to transformation.

The process of apology potentially can pain and wound the recipient as much, maybe even more, than the giver. Apology shifts the power dynamics. The previously more powerful wrongdoer is humbled by expressing regrets. But, at the same time the offended is put into a situation where they are expected to respond. That can be an unsafe experience. Because of the potential for causing further victimization the appropriateness of the call to apology requires discernment. In many circumstances, the church insists that call be tested in community.[214]

Truthing

Jesus was a truth teller. Sometimes he listened to the stories of others, especially the marginalized, and turned the listening into truth telling. The Syrophoenician woman moves Jesus to a new depth of understanding with her truth telling about the unlimited compassion of God. (Mark 7:26-30) In his meeting with the outcast Samaritan woman at the desert well, he spoke the truth to her in ways that facilitated her liberation. (John 4:6-29)

Speaking the truth and listening for the truth is risky. One of the first deacons, Stephen, tells the truth as he sees it, and he is stoned as a result. (Acts 7:54-60) A reflective period of seeking, sorting and sitting with the truth is

[214] For example, the church's process of testing the call of a potential candidate for ministry requires a declaration from the community in a formalized discernment process.

essential in the movement toward true metanoia. Truthing reveals what must be left behind when turning to the new.

Truth remains elusive as it is always conditioned by the stand point of the proclaimer. In the same way that Virginia Ramey Mollenkott speaks of god as a verb rather than a noun, truth might best be thought of as a verb: so truthing rather than one set truth.[215] Using the phrase 'truth telling' David Crocker echoes this idea. He writes, "to meet the challenge of reckoning with past atrocities, a society should investigate, establish, and publically disseminate the truth about [the atrocities.]" [216] It is a moral obligation. Truth is comprised of more than who, what, and where; truth is also revealed through analysis and theorizing. David Crocker cautions, however, that the safety of the victim must be considered. He asks will revelation be followed with efforts for healing wounds and compensation or will there be revictimization in telling the story to deaf ears?[217]

Victims need a public place to tell their stories and have their testimony publicly acknowledged. The public element is crucial, since those who are oppressed have often been silenced. As theologian Nelle Morton eloquently said, it would give occasion for people to be "heard into speech."[218] Being granted a hearing can be extremely empowering and a source of healing itself.

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[215]Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Godding: human responsibility and the Bible* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 4.

[216] David Crocker, "Reckoning With Past Wrongs: A Normative Framework," 44-46.

[217] David Crocker, "Reckoning With Past Wrongs: A Normative Framework," 47.

[218] Nelle Morton, *The Journey is Home (*Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 127.

Confession

Confession means to recognize, with a spirit of contriteness, humility, perhaps even shame, that one has been involved in an injustice; that one has wronged. Confession expresses failure, inadequacy, brokenness. Confession can cut deeply in several ways. One is as the pain that has been inflicted is named and, either relived or newly experienced. This can be painful for the perpetrator and if the confession is public, for the victims. The confessor puts at risk their acceptance in the community and presents a risk that the victims will be further victimized by the confession, if it sets off a backlash or triggers flashbacks, for example. Nevertheless, confession is essential in moving toward any change. The perpetrator is most vulnerable and open during the time of confession and this vulnerability is an essential element in effecting true change. Confession can be coupled with a request for forgiveness, although this is not always so. And it is not always appropriate.

Public and corporate confession establishes identity as a body and marks that a community shares accountability for the actions of all the parts of the whole. The formal and public discourse required to enact a corporate confession presents difficulties. These difficulties are exacerbated when the injustice is largely rooted in the past and the group confessing may not have been directly involved in perpetrating the injustice. The group confessing is taking on a role. However, the “many are not simply persons writ large or aggregates of individuals ... [but are] emergent entities with characteristics that set them apart

from individuals."[219] In assuming their responsibilities they must be prepared to collectively, and sincerely, manifest as if they had been the wrongdoers.

In the process of confession and forgiveness if the practice is actualized in indirect, shallow relationships it can be artificial. If pain and remorse have no faces and no names, then direct human connection is tragically lost and the process is doomed by a superficial façade of "going through the motions."

Confession may be marked by a ritualized moment expressing complicity and regret. Confession is a relational act, involving God, as well as the human parties. In the context of an apology, the "speech act" of 'I'm sorry',[220] has potential to tangibly signal the perpetrator's inner discovery and indicate the sincerity of the confession. In this way confession is sacramental, the outward sign of an inner mystery. In church tradition sacrament should be expressed liturgically.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a freeing experience, providing release and opening space for change in both the one offering the forgiveness and the one receiving it. Forgiveness is a key stage in repairing the ruptures in the conventions (implicit) and covenants (explicit) that establish and sustain a community.[221] Forgiveness often flourishes with grace. Sometimes the only power that a victim of wrongdoing has is to withhold forgiveness, or, ironically, to offer forgiveness as a

[219] Nicholas Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa*, 99.
[220] Nicholas Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa*, 23.
[221] Nicholas Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa*, 7.

strategic act that undermines the evil of the wrongdoer. The wronged can also grant forgiveness in the absence of apology thereby freeing themselves from the burden of living as a victim.

In an apology to a group there is a question of who grants forgiveness. Careful attention must be paid to establishing the expectations of those who represent the offended. To have integrity the players must be prepared and conscious of the role they are assuming. If the representatives of the offended cannot assume the responsibility to grant forgiveness the apology process will be truncated. Those with the agency to offer forgiveness are not obligated to extend it. But if metanoia is to be achieved, the process must provide for the possibility.

Core to Christian doctrine is the belief that God grants forgiveness. The extension of this forgiveness as grace, given without being earned, is a belief of the United Church. The power of God's grace is diminished if it does not lead to true repentance and result in a conversion of heart and spirit. God grants forgiveness, it is up to us to do something with it.

Reconciliation

David Crocker identifies that compensation, restitution or reparation, are essential elements of reconciliation. Reparation can be made to the victims for injustices of the past and should be made to individuals or groups in an effort to restore what was lost.[222]

Reconciliation is made real in forward looking reform and longer term

[222] David Crocker, "Reckoning With Past Wrongs," 51-52.

developments addressing cultures and structures that perpetuate the wrongs or similar wrongs. This includes addressing foundational issues such as sexism, heterosexism and racism, as they are observed in the present. Victims of injustice often experience the commitment to make things better into the future as a deep satisfaction and assurance that there has been a true hearing and sincere understanding of their suffering.[223]

Appropriate reparation or compensation should enhance the capacity for work that ensures future wrongs are not committed. Limited resources of time and money need to be utilized strategically. Only from a reconciled position can the wrongdoer and the wronged determine what the priority is for compensation. The wronged individuals, for example, could determine that resources be directed to education of the whole community rather than used for their personal compensation. To come to this kind of understanding requires dialogue. Dialogue requires relationship. Reconciliation, marked by reparation, signals that the reckoning process is deepening toward transformation for all those involved.

Gospel

Essential in the processes of reckoning a wrong is the act of sharing the gospel. Gospel literally means the good news. Sharing good news, evangelism, is a core task of Christianity. “And Jesus commanded them, ‘Go and tell what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news

[223] David Crocker, "Reckoning With Past Wrongs," 53.

brought to them.' " (Matthew 11:4) The work of telling the story of lament, call, confession, forgiveness, reconciliation, and conversion, constitutes the work of evangelism.

The act of telling itself can be transformational, not just for the hearer, but for the speaker too. Telling the story enables greater understanding as meaning becomes embodied in and through the teller.

Nicholas Tavuchis points out that one strength of a public apology is that it appears on the public record.[224] In that way it becomes concrete and textualized. This has significance for a Christian community who are people of the book. As Walter Brueggemann identifies, once something has been recorded it has a kind of agency that can span across generations.[225]

The good news is not always pleasant. The gospel of Jesus narrates the journey toward liberation with honesty. But the stories can become good news in ways and places that could not have been anticipated.

Metanoia

Metanoia is a profound spiritual transformation or conversion. Traditionally the experience is framed in terms of being born again. This metaphor captures the depth of the transformation, and is indicative of the effort, and pain, which often accompany it. Metanoia is also described as the action of *turning to* something new. This image surpasses and surmounts the experience of

[224] Nicholas Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa*, 102.
[225] Walter Brueggemann, *Texts that Linger Words that Explode Listening to Prophetic Voices* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 9.

repentance, which is to *turn away* from the old.

Metanoia can be personal and individual and it can also "involve the reformation of whole communities at a level so deep that collective identities are transformed."[226] Joan Chittister declares that this kind of conversion changes one's imagination; she suggests that it leads to an *embodied* ability to experience the world in more than one, self centred, static way.[227] Metanoia cannot be claimed if there is no embodied result of the change. Engagement in the reckoning of wrongs should take individuals, and corporate bodies onto a new path. Metanoia is not an intention, it is an achievement. As resurrection people Christians believe metanoia is always a possibility.

The Place of Grace

In the immediacy of reckoning a wrong, however, reaching metanoia is not always possible. That does not mean the efforts are fruitless. Grace can be experienced throughout the process and thereby contribute to the value and worth of engaging in the work of restoring relationship.

Grace is experienced when something "more", something serendipitous, something mysterious is accomplished, when 2 + 2 = 5. Grace moves with the spirit. Grace is not bound or ruled or boxed in by the pursuit of perfection or completion. Grace finds its life in the mystery of relationship between, among and

[226] Russell Daye, *Political Forgiveness Lessons from South Africa*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 11.

[227] Joan D. Chittister, *Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 25.

around all of creation. Grace is not earned, but freely given by God. Grace comes not only with the finish line experience of metanoia, it is available throughout the process. Grace is known, for instance, in the feeling of being forgiven even though you feel unworthy, or in the deep awareness that someone has heard you despite odds against it, or in the comprehension that we are not alone but part of a bigger whole. Grace does not have absolute conditions: it can appear in the midst of brokenness, frailty and failure. Through grace is found the courage to persist in the face of inadequacy or continuing injustice.

God is made known in the reckoning of grace. God is one of the parties in the process, and the consciousness of this differentiates the processes of a faith community from secular ones. God calls humanity into covenantal relationship, with a promise of trustworthy steadfastness. The quality of the relationships formed under the divine covenantal bow differ fundamentally from the contractual relationships of the secular world. This does not mean that reckoning in a faith context can proceed without regard to laws and due process. It does not suggest that there is not grace in a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It does indicate, however, that in the context of faith an explicit awareness and agreement that God's presence is sought, honoured and indeed, expected abides. God's grace invites us to be gracious with one another, to be attentive to creating the space for grace to appear.

Apology in Scripture

Narrative apologies are not recorded frequently in the scripture. However, the themes of forgiveness and repentance are very strong. Probably the most well known passage of scripture, recited in one form or another by millions of people daily, includes “forgive us our debts (sins/trespasses) as we forgive those who owe (sin/trespass against) us.” (Matthew 6:12)

Very often Jesus points to the necessity of a *process* for embodying the gospel message of forgiveness, repentance, and change. A man identified as someone with a lot of wealth, power and prestige in the community converses with Jesus about what it takes to be truly just. The man acknowledges that he abides by the norms of his culture and station in life, ‘is that sufficient?’ he wonders. Jesus responds to the man, “ ‘No, you must ... sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ But when [the man] heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich.” (Luke 18:18ff) This process for salvation offered by Jesus requires reflection on the past, action in the present *and* commitment to a new future. Jesus concludes that to be truly changed requires a relinquishment of power and an expression of vulnerability. This letting go is the only way to make space for more just relationships and structures. The results of this work are great, yet the work is difficult, and scary. Consequently, it can often be hard to enter into and sustain.

Fortunately, the gospel also celebrates grace and generosity. Jesus is asked, “How many times do I have to forgive?” to which he responds, not seven

but seventy seven times. (Matthew 18:21) This recognizes that human relationships are such that reckoning wrongs may take many efforts. The gospel partners a theology of grace with theologies of forgiveness, repentance and change. But, while there is grace, it is not a cheap grace; simultaneously responsibility is expected. Jesus' outrageous command to be patient with those who struggle to be transformed is followed by a parable that demonstrates that those who dally in transforming themselves toward sustained justice will in the end be the maker of their own suffering. (Matthew 18:23-35)

Apology processes open liminal space between the old and the new, where the customary structures of authority are overturned in the search for the new. Sociologist Victor Turner calls this kind of liminal experience, *communitas*.[228] Hallowe'en is a ritualized example of this, where the relational patterns are undone (children make demands on strangers), and new patterns function. Apologies initiate communitas times of reversal: the haughty are humbled and the powerless become the decision makers, and the various roles individuals play are often confused, even contradictory. The potential for significant change out of these experiences is exciting. Recognition of this has been increasing in political as well as religious contexts.[229] Grace can flourish in situations of communitas. Metanoia is possible.

The United Church, like the rich man confronted by the gospel message to

[228] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process Structure and Anti-Structure* (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1995), 96-97.

[229] The Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission being established in Canada is an example of this recognition.

be born again to a new reality, must decide if it is prepared for the hard work of its own conversion. Is the church able to trust that God's grace will sustain?

Applying the Framework

The eight component framework of lament, call, truthing, confession, forgiveness, reconciliation, gospel, and metanoia will guide my reflection on the United Church's attempt to address the wrong of disjoining deaconesses. The goal of its application is to assess the success of the reckoning process in achieving metanoia, not only as an end, but as manifest throughout. The action of applying the framework to the disjoining case is part of the process of reckoning the wrong. The work of gathering the stories and data and evaluating the process theologically is a dimension to the apology response.

Chapter 6

THEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE DISJOINING APOLOGY

The conference room doors of a Toronto airport hotel opened unto the meeting of the General Council Executive. It was a beautiful April day. The guests of the Executive mingled in the sun streaked hallway. Four women stood chatting with the United Church Moderator, Peter Short. Marion (Woods) Kirkwood, Ruth (Sandilands) Lang, Wilma (Unwin) Cade and Joan (Cheesman) Willis were the guests of honour. Representing the hundreds of women disjoined by the United Church because they had married, they were preparing for their role in the "Service of Apology and Appreciation to Women in Ministry Affected by the Disjoining Rule." As the time to begin approached, the members of the Executive took their places at large round tables. At one end of the plush, dimly lit room rows of chairs filled. It was quiet. The disjoined women, their accompanying family members, a few relatives and friends of other affected but not present women took their places. Former Moderator Marion Pardy, a deaconess prior to her ordination, rose to stand at the podium. She warmly welcomed all to the historic occasion.

Thus began the service determined by the General Council Executive (GCE) to be its key response to the call upon the church to apologize for disjoining and its legacy.[230] It was to be the first of many, for the original motion

[230] The United Church of Canada Meeting of the Executive of the General Council

also directed each of the thirteen Conferences[231] to hold a service, sometime within the following year, for the disjoined women within their bounds.[232] However, only two of thirteen Conferences have had such a service.

Much about the service was gracious. When gathered in worship and open to God's spirit, the mystery of grace can create community among people. Grace was active in the room.

Regrettably, the spirit of that worship does not characterize most of the church's response to the call. The debate in the General Council Commission that dealt with the request for apology centred almost entirely on the legal ramifications of the word "apology." [233] The General Council avoided the opportunity for truth telling, for lamenting and confessing its compliance in the injustice of disjoining. Focus was directed to changing apology to "express our sincere regret."[234] The true regret is the church's lost opportunity to experience a transformation.

When the General Council Executive adopted the final draft of the service "express regret" somehow became "apology."[235] It is a hopeful sign: the fear

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Minutes October 28 to October 31, 2006, 325 http://uccdoc.united-church.ca/weblink7/Browse.aspx (accessed November 11, 2008).

[231] Executive of the General Council Minutes October 28 to October 31, 2006, 325.

[232] There are 12 regional Conferences, and an Aboriginal Conference. They are divided into smaller regional Presbyteries.

[233] Sally Meyer, Blue Sessional Committee Member, 38th United Church General Council, Wolfville, personal conversation with Caryn Douglas, by telephone, September, 2004 and February 1, 2007. The argument that apology was too risky won the day, even though the church had consciously made an apology in the Residential Schools question where the possibility of legal action was much more realistic.

[234] The United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings 38th General Council August 10-16, 2003, Wolfville, NS* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2003), 80.

[235] Executive of the General Council Minutes October 28 to October 31, 2006, 325. Bruce Gregersen explained that this was not by any decision or design, it just somehow happened.

bound legalism did not convey the true spirit of the church. Other, small signs of hope can be found in opportunities taken: forgiveness given, story shared, change noted.

In Chapter 5, I detailed a theological framework for assessing an apology. Eight components comprise this framework: lament (recognizing that something is wrong); call (inviting a response); truthing (learning from the story); confession (acknowledging wrong); forgiveness (restoring relationship); reconciliation (concretely marking a new relationship); gospel (expressing good news); and, metanoia (embodying change). This framework serves here as a guide to assess the United Church's apology.

Lament

Lamentation moves in deeply felt anguish that something is wrong. In a process of reckoning a wrong the offended and the offender need to express their own authentic lament.

Public lamentation over sexism can be traced well back in United Church history. But acknowledgement by the church of the sexism involved in the disjoining of deaconesses at marriage did not happen until recently and even then the institutional church has lamented very little.

The disjoined women expressed lament over disjoining, and its foundation of sexism, but most of that lamentation happened decades before the apology was offered. Ruth (Sandilands) Lang, one of the disjoined women at the apology

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Bruce Gregersen, email to Caryn Douglas, March 3, 2007.

service explained:

> I was angry in 1955, about losing my status and the battle I had with Mrs. Campion [the Executive Secretary of the Deaconess Order, over returning my pin]... I was really angry about the whole situation of how we were thrown out as it were, and yet the church was very happy to have us do all the work.[236]

After graduation from the United Church Training School (UCTS) in 1951 Ruth served for several years as a deaconess, where she met and became engaged to Wib Lang, a recently ordained United Church minister. When she married Wib she was disjoined from the Order and Tena Campion asked her for her pin back during the annual national gathering of deaconesses. Ruth, who was wearing her pin at the 2006 General Council Executive (GCE) service of apology, was adamant that she was not going to return it.

> Mrs. Campion said [she needed mine back] because someone might lose theirs ... well [I said] 'I'll buy them another one, they are not getting mine!' I remember standing up and saying this [to the whole Deaconess Order.] I did not like them asking for my pin, that was so small.[237]

Ruth did not remember her indignation raising any protest among her sisters, but the voice of those opposed and hurt was beginning to be heard, for the rule was being debated in the church structures.

For many of the disjoined women, while they may have been disappointed, hurt, even angry about the decision they were forced to make between statused ministry and marriage, they accepted it as the way things were. Jean (Baynton) Shilton, who was disjoined in 1945, wrote to the General

[236] Ruth Lang, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Toronto, April 30, 2006.
[237] Ruth Lang, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Toronto, April 30, 2006.

Council after receiving an invitation to attend the service. She explained:

> While I thought the rule was quaint and mildly amusing, I had no sense of being treated unjustly by the church. I shared the common assumption in those days that marriage was a full-time job for a woman and since I would no longer be working as a deaconess it was no hardship to lose the designation. Viewed from the perspective of 2006 the rule looks discriminatory, but in 1945 I did not experience it as so.[238]

With the rise of feminist consciousness more questions were being voiced about the inherent injustice of the treatment women had experienced. Marion (Woods) Kirkwood was never officially disjoined because at graduation from the UCTS in 1957 she was faced with the choice of marriage to Jim, who was about to be ordained as a United Church minister, or following her call to be a deaconess. Marion explained:

> It wasn't really a choice, I wanted to get married and I accepted that...When it *really* hit me was in the 70's, Jim and I went to Africa, and we were both appointed as overseas personnel, we both attended missionary orientation, we both had theological training, except that there was one salary cheque that went to Jim, there was one position and it was Jim's![239]

Wilma (Unwin) Cade, who became a deaconess in 1960, and was disjoined four years later said:

> I remember being quite upset, … [I was] upset about the fact that I would never be able to work in the church, I had spent all this time getting an education and I'd worked hard at it ... I wanted to serve Christ in the church, I felt called to do this and I would never really have this opportunity, and, I wasn't about to work a 40 hour week for free … I felt really, really distressed.[240]

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[238] Jean Shilton, letter to Rev. Dr. Bruce Gregerson, General Council Minister, Programs for Mission and Ministry copied to Caryn Douglas, Principal, Centre for Christian Studies, March 12, 2006.

[239] Marion Kirkwood, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Toronto, April 30, 2006.

[240] Wilma Cade, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Toronto, April 30, 2006.

Lamentation was voiced over the continuing injustice by those women who had been disjoined and sought reinstatement in the 1970s and 80s. Diaconal Minister[241] Verna (Crooks) McKay married in 1966 and discontinued paid work, but did not lose her status as a deaconess. Verna does not recall being aware of disjoining until her friend Agnes (Snyder) Blokland sought reinstatement in the 1970s. Verna was angry with the church that Agnes had to begin all over again with the process of assessing her call and appropriateness for ministry. At that time in the church ordained ministers who had not been in active ministry for extended periods of time were not required to undergo this scrutiny. "[Agnes] had to go through a discernment committee and I just couldn't believe it. ... Agnes had been commissioned in 1952, and I remember thinking, how can it be that the church would require this of her again?"[242] But Verna recalls that Agnes complied, "Making a scene about it wasn't Agnes, and besides, the church had the power."[243]

When Ruth Lang was reinstated as a Diaconal Minister in 1978 the church would not count her disjoined years when placing her into the seniority based salary scale. [244] Upon her retirement in 1986 Toronto Conference continued to

[241] The gender specific term Deaconess is no longer used in the United Church in favour of Diaconal Minister.

[242] Verna McKay, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Winnipeg, March 5, 2006.

[243] Verna McKay, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Winnipeg, March 5, 2006.

[244] There is no record of Ruth's reinstatement in the Record of Proceedings of Toronto Conference. Her name simply appears in the Conference directory in 1979, as well as in The United *Church Yearbook* for 1979 as a Diaconal Minister. Other disjoined women, returning to paid work either as deaconesses or as lay workers had their salary level similarly affected. In some cases the United Church Yearbook (2007) records years of service for reinstated deaconesses from that of their original designation, but in others, it is only noted from the date of

treat her unjustly by refusing to acknowledge her disjoining when calculating her years of ministry service. “If I had been an ordained man in 1952, held a pastoral charge for four years, been a teacher for the next 30 I’d have been celebrated for 34 years in ministry!”[245] Eventually she got her all her years recognized.

> My anger was raised again when I had to meet the system ... [eventually] I just wrote back laughing about the whole thing thinking ‘look, it’s not that bad’, I didn’t really care that much *but I questioned the injustice of it*.[246] [emphasis mine]

Joan (Cheesman) Willis was one of the disjoined women at the apology service. Joan’s lament expresses the loss of community that she felt. She refers to herself as a “dormant deaconess.”[247] This term reveals Joan’s natural wit, and as good humour can, it serves to acknowledge and critique the status quo. Joan commented that she had no contact from anyone after her marriage, not from the Order, from the church or from other deaconesses. She described 50 years of silence, “It is as if my name was taken right off the record.”[248] Joan’s experience of being physically disjoined from the deaconess network was common. The continual disruption in the community and the loss of its carriers of experience contributed to silencing the lament. Theologian Kwok Pui-lan notes that when lament is privatized and hidden “women’s lives [are] trivialized and their contributions erased from our memories.”[249]

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their reinstatement.

[245] Ruth Lang, interview by Caryn Douglas, Oakville, ON, January 12, 2006.

[246] Ruth Lang, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Toronto, April 30, 2006.

[247] Joan Willis, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Toronto, April 30, 2006.

[248] Joan Willis, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Toronto, April 30, 2006.

[249] Kwok Pui-lan. "Mothers and Daughters, Writers and Fighters" in *Inheriting Our Mother's Gardens* Letty Russell, Kwok Pui-lan, Ada Marie Isasi-Diaz, Katie Cannon, ed. (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1988), 27.

In her public response to the apology during the General Council Executive service, Wilma Cade observed:

> I remembered the grief, the anger. All of my friends have had very bitter experiences in the church. About 25 years ago the deaconesses were gathered for some decision making at Cedar Glen. What astonished and distressed many was the outpouring of pain, the feelings of rejection and marginalization. Many professional women returned to earlier careers. Most gave countless hours of quality leadership for free.[250]

Joyce (McMaster) Scott, who was disjoined in 1953, took the General Council decision to a reunion of United Church Training School graduates in June 2004. Joyce was one of the women anxious to see the apology delivered and to have some recognition of the contribution the women, like herself, made to the church *despite* their lack of status. She was interested in seeing the church acknowledge the disjoining not just for her, and not just to benefit the other women, but for the sake of the church itself. In her view the church was far too late in making this move, but hoped it would contribute to making women truly members of the church.[251] Not all the women in attendance felt the same. Some, like Wilma Cade felt indifferent, at least at first, but as more discussion took place among the reunion participants some began to recognize their feelings of anger. Some women however, were not comfortable at all with the idea of an apology. Dorothy Naylor, who was disjoined in 1963 because she stopped working as a deaconess held this view. She explained, “I chose not to work in accountable

[250] Wilma Cade, “Response to The United Church’s Apology and Appreciation to Women in Ministry Affected by the Disjoining Rule” United Church General Council Executive Meeting, Toronto: April 30, 2006. The whole text of her response appears as Appendix 3 below.

[251] Joyce Scott, Interview by Caryn Douglas, Sydney, BC, February 27, 2006.

ministry while the kids were young. Returning did not involve jumping over a lot of hoops. So personally, I feel no need for an apology."[252] No attempt was made at the reunion to achieve any consensus of opinion or even to note specific perspectives. Disjoined women have no group identity or formal organization. They have not shared the stories of their lament. The women at the reunion, which was only a sample of those disjoined, would have been hard pressed to give a corporate response, to even determine, for example, if they were open to having an apology given. Not that the courts of the United Church ever asked.

The anger of 25 or 50 years ago has largely dissipated, the majority of the women directly affected by the rule have died, they are all now past the age of retirement. Those who can remember have mixed feelings. They have moved on, made the best of things. In Wilma Cade's response, she also said, "My initial indifference – after all it was a long time ago and life has travelled on – began to evaporate as memories returned. I remembered the grief, the anger."[253] While the lament has lingered, and opening the topic for the women results in the expression of pain, it is more the memory of the pain, than the deeply felt experience of pain that characterizes the lament.

Disjoining, as a tool for a patriarchal and sexist ecclesiology, caused women pain. It rendered so many of them invisible, yet the United Church did not enter into the lament of this reality. Disjoining diminished the fullness of God's mission, yet the United Church did not enable itself to identify and lament this

[252] Dorothy Naylor, email to Caryn Douglas, July 2, 2005.
[253] Wilma Cade, "Response to the United Church's Apology".

reality. The church missed the opportunity to "speak neither in rage nor in cheap grace, but with the candor born of anguish and passion." [254] Without the passion of lament the journey toward metanoia has no beginning.

Call

The process of moving from lament resulted from one woman's sense of call that the church should be brought to account for the injustice of disjoining. Call comes from deep within an individual but its validity is tested in community. This call to action was not tested with the community of wronged women prior to its utterance. What testing occurred was after the call was made, but not in very intentional or effective ways.

In the summer of 2003, the General Council decided to express regret for disjoining. This decision was made without any knowledge of it among those women most directly affected. I first learned of it in the fall of that year, after the General Council had approved the apology. A commissioner to the General Council mentioned it to me in passing. When I shared the news with colleagues and graduates of the Centre for Christian Studies they frequently responded with the question, "Whose idea was this?"

The call to action was born out of the heart of Callie Archer, a Hamilton Conference laywoman.[255] In December 2000, Callie met Joan (Peck) McDonald. Joan graduated from the United Church Training School in 1948 and was

[254] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 50.

[255] Callie Archer, interview by Caryn Douglas, by telephone, April 12, 2006.

designated a deaconess in 1950. After a number of years of successful ministry at Metropolitan and Bloor Street United Churches (Toronto), she met, and married Richard McDonald and she was disjoined from the Deaconess Order. Tena Campion, Secretary of the Order, told Joan matter of factly, “You can no longer work for the church.” Like many other women who were disjoined, she refused to relinquish her pin. Joan was taken up immediately with the responsibilities of raising children, but she was determined to eventually return to her official church work. But she never did. Instead, she became a teacher, an active lay woman and an ongoing social activist working with refugees, prisoners, and extensively on poverty issues.[256]

Callie learned quickly of the much deserved reputation Joan had for being a champion of social justice. The two women worked together on a conference justice committee and as they became friends Callie learned Joan’s story. Callie had never heard of the church’s practice of disjoining before and it made her angry that women had been treated in such a “shameful” manner. She also wondered how much of Joan’s leadership potential, especially leadership for social justice work, had been lost when she was removed from public, recognized ministry. Callie mentioned the idea to Joan of petitioning the General Council, not for an apology, but to recognize the injustice, but Joan was not going to pursue it. Callie explained:

> I could see it as a justice issue, the kind of issue that would make women like Joan stand up and take a stand, but like many social

[256] Elizabeth Eberhart-Moffat, “Coming ‘Round to Ourselves”, Sermon preached at United Church of Canada General Council Executive, Sunday, April 30, 2006.

> activists, especially women from a certain era, they do not push their own issues.[257]

At the meeting of Hamilton Conference of the United Church in 2003, Callie asked Elizabeth Eberhart-Moffat to help her draft a petition. Initially the petition was seen as a tool to bring this story to light; no idea of apology was envisioned at first.[258] As they shaped the petition the idea of an apology emerged. Elizabeth knew about the disjoining rule. She recalled being at a meeting of church women in the 1980's. The theme centred around the metaphor of lambs in the forest assured of safety but all the while under the watch of the wolf who is making snarling noises. Women were invited to share their stories reflecting on the theme. An older woman in the group spoke about her silencing, through the threat and then the actualization, of disjoining.

This story deeply moved Elizabeth. The more Elizabeth and Callie considered the issue the more drawn Elizabeth was to move forward, seeing how disjoining was a strong symbol of gender injustice. She and her partner had initiated a petition to the General Council several decades before around an issue of justice for clergy couples that had resulted in change. And now, here was another example of injustice related to married status and Elizabeth was willing to trust the system to be responsive again.

But why an apology? Elizabeth explained, "I thought an apology might empower the women who are still alive ... with new life and validate them, it is

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[257] Callie Archer, interview by Caryn Douglas, by telephone, April 12, 2006.

[258] Elizabeth Eberhart-Moffatt, interview by Caryn Douglas, by telephone, January 30, 2006.

horrible when things are forgotten and buried."[259] Callie was also optimistic that the apology could lead to systemic change. Like Elizabeth she wanted healing for the angst women suffered and for their families, and she also wanted the apology to change the church. "To heal as a church we need to acknowledge our own behavior,"[260] Callie expressed. Elizabeth linked this apology to others that the United Church has made, particularly the apology to Native peoples made in 1986. She optimistically expressed,

> ...like the Native apology, I think of the education that has come out of it – these [disjoined] women aren't going to go to the courts, it's not in the nature of who they are – but through this apology, the church could embrace another chance to be the church 'non-triumphant.'[261]

The petition "Apology to United Church Deaconesses and Ordained Women Clergy" went from Hamilton Conference to the General Council meeting at Wolfville, Nova Scotia in 2003 with Concurrence.[262] It called on the

> General Council [to] find a way on our behalf to formally apologize to these women [deaconesses and ordained women clergy mandated to relinquish their rights to practice ministry if and when they married] and express our sorrow for the loss of their leadership to the church.[263]

In their call to a public reckoning of the disjoining injustice, Callie and Elizabeth expressed a hope that it would result in change, in embodied metanoia, both systemic and personal. The process they set in motion has fallen short of

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[259] Elizabeth Eberhart-Moffatt, interview by Caryn Douglas, by telephone, January 30, 2006.

[260] Callie Archer, interview by Caryn Douglas, by telephone, April 12, 2006.

[261] Elizabeth Eberhart-Moffatt, interview by Caryn Douglas, by telephone, January 30, 2006.

[262] See Appendix 1.

[263] The United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings 38th General Council August 10-16, 2003, Wolfville, NS* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2003), 481.

that objective however.

Truthing

The knowledge of marriage bars for women in Canada is spotty. The specific story of disjoining is even more obscure, even within the United Church. Truthing requires public storytelling, to bring healing for the women and to move the church to a greater understanding of the wrong committed. Because the era of wrongdoing began nearly a century ago, it also requires historical research and analysis for the church to frame its reflection.

At the General Council meeting the petition from Hamilton Conference, was reviewed by a Commission (sub-group). No background documentation was provided to accompany the petition. No one was asked to speak to it. No one was invited to provide even a sketchy outline of what the practice had been or why the church might apologize. No one reflected theologically on this act of discrimination. No one articulated the dynamics of the continuing sexism in the church. No one told their story. After the General Council determined it was going to act, national Church staff person, Mary Anne MacFarlane, a church historian and a diaconal minister with expertise in diaconal history, was asked to write a background paper. This paper offers excellent contextualization and analysis. It gives a short history of the disjoining rule. It outlines some of the negative effects of the rule.[264] Unfortunately, the paper is brief. It does not include any stories, as

[264] Mary Anne MacFarlane, Background Paper Apology to United Church Deaconesses and Ordained Women, General Council Executive Meeting (April 21-25, 2005) Docket, Appendix

the author was not commissioned to do that research.

As the date for giving the apology drew closer, responsibility for it fell to the General Council's Permanent Committee on Mission and Ministry. Lead staff Bruce Gregerson was assigned to implement the apology.[265] Bruce invited three women he knew to have been affected by the disjoining rule,[266] as well as myself, as Principal of the Centre for Christian Studies, to review an initial draft of the back ground paper and the service. Strangely, the draft did not include the Prayer for Repentance and Forgiveness, which was identified as "the central liturgical act of repentance."[267] I had two key concerns: there was no storytelling that would reveal the truth, and no analysis that would elucidate the consequences and implications for the present. Unbelievably, the reflection time in the service, the time when a story might be told or analysis might be shared, was named as "optional." I did not see any of the feedback given by the other women.

The next draft of the service was virtually identical to the first draft, although the reflection was no longer optional, and it included the prayer of

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4, United Church of Canada, p DR55.

[265] Bruce Gregerson, General Council Minister, Programs for Mission and Ministry, email to Caryn Douglas, March 3, 2007.

[266] The three women consulted were in the diaconal stream. There was no consultation, to my knowledge, with ordained women affected by the church's marriage bar. The bar for ordained women and the disjoining of deaconesses, while similar, were two distinct processes. This distinction was noted in the background document prepared by Mary Anne McFarlane, but the subtly and complexity of the issues were not clear to many of those involved.

[267] Bruce Gregerson, General Council Minister, Programs for Mission and Ministry, to Ruth Lang, Joyce Scott, Dorothy Naylor, Caryn Douglas, July 13, 2005. Mark MacLean, national Worship staff wrote the service, Joan McMurtry, an ordained minister serving in BC wrote the prayer of repentance. Gwen McMurtry, the woman disjoined twice (see below), was her aunt.

repentance.[268] With the second draft was an invitation for feedback on the prayer. I had several concerns but I did not feel that it was my place to critique this aspect of the service as I was not one of the disjoined women. Dorothy Naylor had responded to the initial draft but did not respond to the second request for feedback. She explained to me that she was curious why she was being asked to speak on behalf of other women, particularly since she did not want the apology. She did not feel responsible for providing more feedback.[269] Health concerns and the need for a sudden move kept Ruth Lang from responding. Joyce Scott did not respond either. When asked why, she paused and then offered this as way of explanation, "[Jesus is my model], in the gospels he was a teacher, not a lecturer, he told stories that lived and made people think."[270] So the central act of the service proceeded without benefit of response from the women it was meant to address. The opportunity to let their truth direct the church's action was lost.

The letter accompanying the second draft made a commitment to respond to the concern I had raised regarding documenting the disjoining.

> [It] has [been] recommended that more research should be done on the personal stories of women affected by the rule. … I do see the possibility of undertaking some further research … [before the service] and will explore how we might include some of these stories.[271]

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[268] See Appendix 2.

[269] Dorothy Naylor, conversation with Caryn Douglas, by telephone, October 9, 2005.

[270] Joyce Scott, Interview by Caryn Douglas, Sydney, BC, February 27, 2006.

[271] Bruce Gregerson, General Council Minister, to Ruth Lang, Joyce Scott, Dorothy Naylor, Caryn Douglas, Catherine Ambrose, September 15, 2005. Catherine Ambrose was mistakenly identified as a disjoined woman.

This research was never commissioned. Except for the background paper prepared (mentioned above) for the GCE members, no plan was developed to conduct any research or self examination, either about past actions or current practices. Russell Daye concludes that, “Any attempt to rush to the granting of forgiveness without a careful exposition of the unjust actions through documentation or through the generation of a narrative will bastardize the process.”[272] In preparation for moving toward apology, the church did little to make space for truth telling. Another lost opportunity.

It is not hard to find stories which demonstrate how disjoining opportunistically served the needs of the church, which was willing to abandon rigidly held positions to suit its own needs, treating women as disposable. This is one example.

Gwen (Davis) McMurtry was one of three sisters who graduated from the United Church Training School and became deaconesses. All three of them were disjoined.[273] Gwen was designated a deaconess in May, 1944. [274] Although engaged to Doug at the time, no objection was raised, even though she was upfront that she would be marrying. This was not unusual, the whole system was predicated on deaconess work being temporary, but in the absence of many men serving in the war the openness to deaconesses, even if term, was even greater. Gwen went to serve the congregation at Lethbridge. When Doug got word that he

[272] Russell Daye, *Political Forgiveness Lessons from South Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 9.

[273] Irene (Davis) Inglis, graduated 1932; Gwendaline (Davis) McMurtry, graduated 1943; Winnifred (Davis) Henderson, graduated 1948. They are all now deceased.

[274] Doug McMurtry, interview by Caryn Douglas, Winnipeg, February 13, 2006.

was going to be sent overseas for alternative service (he was a conscientious objector) he and Gwen got married in December 1944. She resigned from her position and considered herself disjoined. In January, 1945, the Committee on the Deaconess Work, which had oversight of the Order, discussed the case. The Committee decided that:

> since Mrs. McMurtry's husband would be serving in China with "The Friends Ambulance Unit" and considering the fine work she has been doing in Lethbridge that she be continued as a member of the Deaconess Order.[275]

Gwen agreed to this offer and was deployed again as a working deaconess. When the Committee became aware of Doug's return to Canada in 1947 they "agreed that Mrs. McMurtry be appraised of the ruling as found in the Constitution and that she be now disjoined from the Order."[276]

Doug McMurtry did not recall his wife being angry at having to relinquish her status again. As he remembers, she did not have any real debate because the option of work and vocation for women was just not possible, although the church had the power to make it possible arbitrarily! She did, however, relish the time during which she could break the rules and do the work she had been trained to do and had a calling for. Her story could serve to draw the church up short, to be startled into a deeper self examination, but her story did not get any press.[277]

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[275] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Minutes of the Committee on Deaconess Work, January 24, 1945. Series 206 82.292C Box 1-6.

[276] The United Church of Canada Archives (Toronto) Fonds 501. Minutes of the Committee on Deaconess Work, May 20, 1947. Series 206 82.292C Box 1-6.

[277] I expected to find evidence of other exemptions to the disjoining rule during the war

Another unrecorded story is that of Joyce (McMaster) Scott who began serving in Renfrew Presbytery in 1952 and was designated in 1953. She was allowed to attend the Presbytery meetings, but as a deaconess she was not entitled to membership. The chair of the Presbytery approached her at the end of her first year and asked her if she would serve as the chair of the Christian Education Committee. Joyce replied:

> 'I'd love to do that, but I can't, I'm not a member of the presbytery.' His face just dropped …. They were happy enough to have us around to do the work that men weren't really interested in.[278]

By 1955 Joyce was married to Norm, an ordained United Church minister. Joyce did not recall getting any formal notice of her disjoining. In her view:

> There was nothing, absolutely nothing. No 'thank you', no 'we hope you will be happy', no 'now continue on as the minister's wife.' You just knew what you were to do, and they never asked for my pin, I still have it! … The record keeping [was not good.] Later, when I worked [as a lay person] in new church development in Regina I got a letter from [the General Council offices in] Toronto asking 'Who are you?' They said they had no record of me.[279]

Joyce never sought reinstatement as a deaconess because, she explained, "When others got it, I never heard about it. No one told me it was possible."[280] When she later learned about the possibility it did not interest her. Joyce reflected:

> My vocation was really to the work, diaconal work, the good stuff, and I was doing it, as a minister's wife and then, once Norm was in

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period when the shortage of ministry personnel was so acute, but Gwen McMurtry's story is unique. There is no indication in the minutes about why this aberration to the rules occurred. She was the first and only married deaconess in the United Church until 1956.

[278] Joyce Scott, Interview by Caryn Douglas, Sydney, BC, February 27, 2006.
[279] Joyce Scott, Interview by Caryn Douglas, Sydney, BC, February 27, 2006.
[280] Joyce Scott, Interview by Caryn Douglas, Sydney, BC, February 27, 2006.

> the Conference office, it was just me as a volunteer. I want the church to do this apology not for kicking us out, but [because] even though it was hard and we were denied access, we were ministers.[281]

Opening space for truth telling reveals that effects of disjoining extend far beyond Canada. Omega Bula, originally from Zambia and now on the General Council office staff, attended the service. She was disappointed but not surprised that the connection to the United Church's colonial practices had not been made. Exported to Zambia with the missionaries, disjoining became a norm for the United Church of Zambia's Deaconess Order. It is still affecting them today. Omega explained:

> The single woman deaconess was modelled by Essie Johnson [a United Church Deaconess who served in Zambia in the 50s and 60s.] She was a hugely influential model. It still remains in the psyche of Zambian deaconesses, and the [United Church of Zambia], that the way to be a pure deaconess is to be single. When women could be ordained in Zambia they too had to be single, it was modelled after the diaconal [pattern.][282]

She went on to explain that the rule was lifted toward the end of the 80s, but she could not remember precisely when, because, while the rule is gone the practice remains very active. The few Zambian deaconesses who have defied the practice are treated with much less respect.

Omega asked how she could participate in an apology when she, and those around her, did not even know what they were apologizing for. This story of the exporting of the rule has been documented and could have informed the

[281] Joyce Scott, Interview by Caryn Douglas, Sydney, BC, February 27, 2006.
[282] Omega Bula, Executive Minister, Justice Global and Ecumenical Relations Unit, Interview by Caryn Douglas, April 30, 2006.

church's apology. In her popular book on the Woman's Missionary Society, Donna Sinclair documents that WMSers were conscious of the social impact of single women in leadership in mission situations. They understood that there was both gift and dilemma in it.[283] These women modelled singleness and independence for women, and a family structure that did not need husband and children thereby increasing options for women as leaders. At the same time, legislating singleness imposed a new kind of restriction.[284]

The church did not use this opportunity to uncloak its patriarchal, sexist colonialism, either in the past or in its continuing impact today. It missed an opportunity to engage in learning about the ongoing and insidious nature of "empire." It lost the chance to wrestle with the inherent ambiguity in making change. At the same meeting of the Executive at which the apology was presented, a major report "Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire" was presented and approved to be sent to the General Council.[285] Ironically, one of the key recommendations of the report calls on the church to speak the truth about the insidious legacy of its colonial past!

The truth of disjoining could draw the United Church into deep reflection

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[283] Donna Sinclair, *Crossing Worlds: The Story of the Woman's Missionary Society of The United Church of Canada* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1992).

[284] The importing of the single status for deaconesses happened in other places. In the Methodist Church in New Zealand the first Maori deaconess was gifted to the church by her family in a wedding style ceremony. The concept of singleness was so unacceptable to the Maori culture it was nearly impossible to attract Maori women to the diaconate. The Methodist church made an exemption in 1935 allowing Maori deaconesses to be married. Pakeha (white) women did not get this right until the 1960s. Margaret Tennant, "Pakeha Deaconesses and the New Zealand Methodist Mission to Maori 1893 - 1940" in *The Journal of Religious History*, Vol 223, No 3, (October 1999), 309 -326.

[285] The United Church of Canada, "Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire" *Report to the 39th General Council 2006* (Toronto: United Church of Canada, 2007).

on itself. Appropriately organized and facilitated, this reflection could lead to genuine conversation that might be painful and disturbing. Yet such conversation offers the promise of faithful revelation and meaningful transformation. Sadly, the church did not take the time to sit with the story and history. It did not give itself the space, the resources or the commitment to engage in the hard work of truth telling.

Confession

In the tradition of the United Church, public confession includes a request for God's forgiveness, followed by an assurance of God's pardon. Public and corporate confession is a well practiced ritual in the United Church, a frequent aspect of Sunday worship and something that the church should do well.

In this case, the confession offered by the church was shallow. There was little preparation for those who were confessing. Discernment of the wrong that had been committed was lacking. The church did not even find out to whom it was saying sorry.

The act of confession that took place in April 2006 was embedded in the service that included scripture, hymns and a sermon addressing the issues.[286] This act named repentance for wrongdoings, grief for a lack of vision, being sorry for the policies and practices that denied gifts and the recanting of sexism. Also included was a call for the church to be open to change and an assurance of

[286] See Appendix 2.

forgiveness. The sermon, given by Elizabeth Eberhart Moffat,[287] focused on Joan McDonald's story, and set the disjoining in the context of ongoing sexism. Elizabeth drew to mind the United Church tradition of acknowledging "we stand corrected", but she cautioned, "lest we become known only as the church of the next apology, let us also remind ourselves of the temptations of a cheap grace, which revels in drama and false pride."[288]

Marion Kirkwood, Ruth Lang, Wilma Cade and Joan Willis were present to represent the disjoined women. Also present were family members of both the representative women and of others: daughters, granddaughters, husbands. They, along with the GCE members, placed a stone in a large bowl of water and Elizabeth stated that the bowl stood for the women being remembered:

> [for] those who were asked to officially disjoin themselves from the ministries to which they had been called:
> - women who were left unemployed, in poverty, and shut out from the courts of the church; …
> - women held hostage by an ethic that put marriage and child bearing ahead of God's call to service and made them mutually exclusive;
> - women who became victims of a policy of discrimination that was conveniently used whenever there was an over-supply of clergy …[289]

Wilma Cade, who was disjoined more than a decade after the rule had begun to be repealed, was asked to speak on behalf of the women. She powerfully spoke the truth and the other women present were appreciative of her courage and forthrightness as she named the injustices done in the past and

[287] Elizabeth Eberhart-Moffat was one of the women who wrote the initiating petition.
[288] Elizabeth Eberhart-Moffat, "Coming 'Round to Ourselves."
[289] Elizabeth Eberhart-Moffat, "Coming 'Round to Ourselves."

challenged the church to see the continuing injustices today. She also gave thanks for the women and drew attention to the contribution that they made, and are still making, to the church.

> As I have recalled the work done by my classmates in Africa, Hong Kong, Japan, India, the Caribbean, and Canada, I am proud to be part of this ministry. As I reflect on the contribution to our Church made by those who received no remuneration, I give thanks for their sacrifice and devotion.[290]

The women were appreciative of the effort of the church to confess and apologize, but they were also critical. When they gathered an hour after the service to reflect on their experience, their first and strong response focused on their own participation in the litany of repentance. The rubric to the whole congregation was "say together this prayer," so the women also read aloud the repentance prayer. Marion Kirkwood explained, "I felt like I was apologizing to myself, it was very weird." This lack of attention to preparing the women to play the appropriate role could be viewed as a small oversight, but in the context of all the missed opportunities to make this process deep and meaningful, it is symbolic of the lack of engagement on behalf of the wrongdoer.

Encouragingly, the interviews conducted with some of the GCE members immediately after the service reveal that there was engagement and reflection by those cast in the representative role of the wrongdoer. The service evoked connection between the disjoining experience and their own story, between the present moment and their own past. Nearly 60% of the interviewees spoke about their mothers. Comments like: "[I am the] son of a teacher who had to resign the

[290] Wilma Cade, "Response to the United Church's Apology."

minute she started to show with me", "[I was] fighting back tears as I remembered the women, I think of my mother and her leadership in CGIT ...", "my mother, she was not affected but had thought of a vocation ... [did she reject it] to marry?" [291] Connections were named between the apology and the church's past. "[Most striking for me today is the awareness of the] loss of what we could have had, could have been blessed with," "it is an important apology ... it reminds me of the changes that have occurred ... for women in ministry." This engagement and willingness to be open to a vulnerability of self exploration indicates that a fuller process could have proven to be very valuable in moving people to a deeper level and toward some contemplation for change. The potential was so great; the loss of opportunity is sharp.

The responses of the GCE members, though, mostly reflect on the meaning of the apology in the past. Some comment on what it might mean for the church in the future, but very little is said about the present. The prevalence of remembering and reflecting on history is in keeping with the whole mood of the service, the stress in the apology on confession for past injustices. Four older women, now well retired, were the face of the apology in its unfolding, and they stood in as symbol of something that was in the past.

Manitou Conference was one of only three of the thirteen United Church Conferences that held an apology service. Executive Secretary, Will Kunder explained:

[291] Interviews conducted by Betsy Anderson, Caryn Douglas's Research Assistant, with General Council Executive Members, after the Apology to Disjoined Women, April 30, 2006.

> The Conference Executive engaged in some learning and discussion about the disjoining policy as planning for the [May 2006] Celebration of Ministry Service took place. We located the Apology within a broader celebration of women in ministry... a number of significant anniversaries were honoured at the same time:
> - 50 years since Geraldine Bould was designated as a Deaconess and Commissioned as a Missionary under the Woman's Missionary Society
> - 25 years since Ordination & 29 years since Commissioning of Mary-Jo Ekert Tracy
> - 25th anniversary of the election of Dorothy Hemingway as the first lay woman President of Conference
> All three had a significant block of time to share something of their stories with the Conference. During the service, [diaconal minister] Kay Heuer, dressed in [an old] deaconess "uniform" … shared an introduction and overview of the topic, prior to inviting all gathered to offer the printed "Prayer for Repentance and Forgiveness" [from the General Council Executive service.][292]

Geraldine Bould is the only disjoined women within the bounds of Manitou Conference. She was disjoined in 1960, and was reinstated in 1971. The vacant pastoral charge neighbouring the one being served by her ordained husband David needed a minister. Geraldine was prepared to serve there. She remembers jumping thorough a lot of hoops before her status was finally restored. She continued to serve in this remote area of the church until her retirement in 1993.[293] The efforts of the Conference to support the confession with education and story brings hope. They took hold of some of the opportunity the apology presented.

[292] Will Kunder, email to Caryn Douglas, December 15, 2008.
[293] Will Kunder, telephone conversation with Caryn Douglas, February 19, 2009.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness frees. Within the embrace of forgiveness moving to something new is much more possible. God's unearned forgiveness comes to us by grace. But without integrating the forgiveness, and letting it reshape us, its value is limited.

The four women in attendance at the service agreed they had forgiven "the United Church this disjoining many years ago."[294] Granting forgiveness enabled them to put away anger and move on to make meaning with their lives. They forgave the church through grace. They forgave without the church making a request, without the church listening for their lament, and, without the church offering a confession. Their forgiveness was not earned.

All this is fortuitous, because during the apology service the church did not ask for forgiveness, not from the women nor from God. The Prayer of Repentance and Forgiveness [295] contains some expression of lament, some truth telling, and confession. The church calls on God's help to reconcile and make change in the future, but the church makes no request for forgiveness. Without the humbling act of asking for forgiveness, the church, however, assures itself that God has forgiven it.

Reflecting on the service, Wilma Cade said, "I noticed that the church was very quick to forgive itself. Did you notice that?"[296] The three other women in the group all nodded their heads in agreement. This observation was confirmed by

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[294] Wilma Cade, "Response to the United Church's Apology."
[295] See Appendix 2 for the Order of Service and the Prayer.
[296] Wilma Cade, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Toronto, April 30, 2006.

diaconal minister, Ted Dodd, when reviewing a copy of the service. He said:

> I appreciate the sense of regret, but it sure feels like we need to leap to [giving ourselves] forgiveness there in the last paragraph, a rush to assurance. We can't just sit in the lament. We can't honour the wrongdoing; we always have to have a happy ending.[297]

Ironically, sitting with the lament, honouring the wrongdoing through truth telling, and becoming vulnerable through confession, are the actions that hold the greatest promise of the happy ending of a true change of heart and spirit!

The four disjoined women made a distinction between giving forgiveness and accepting the apology of the church. But the church did not ask the women if they were prepared to accept the apology. Twenty years earlier, when the church made its apology to Aboriginal people, built into the process was a time for the receivers to determine together their response. They discerned it was not time to accept it. Two years later the Aboriginal people communicated to the church that they were ready to acknowledge the apology and hoped that it was "not symbolic but that these are the words of action and sincerity."[298]

Marion Kirkwood expressed the common feeling of the women:

> Many parts of the service were affirming of my story, but, what I really wanted to say [was] ... 'we want to see some action now' … Before we really accept this apology let's see some ways of moving [the church] ahead because I think that since the Decade [of Churches in Solidarity with Women] ended things have gone backwards in the church. What about the injustices that are still happening to women in ministry and lay women in the United

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[297] Ted Dodd, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Winnipeg, March 5, 2006.

[298] Edith Memnook, "Response to the 1986 Apology" *Record of Proceedings of the 32nd (1988) General Council of The United Church of Canada* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1988), 79.

Church of Canada?[299]

Who actually is it that gives forgiveness in this situation? “It would not be appropriate for me to accept this Apology from the Church, as I can’t speak for others,”[300] Wilma Cade explained. Who are the others? Who really was affected by the disjoining? Are the wronged people only those who were technically disjoined, or is the group affected much bigger than that? In this situation the office of the diaconate and all those who are members of the order are affected because the Order has been shaped by the outcomes of this policy. All women in ministry still labour in the shadow cast by sexist policies and discriminatory actions geared to women church personnel.

The service touched some of those giving and receiving the apology but the opportunity for the church to be taken to a deeper state of reflection was lost. In its muted appeal for forgiveness the church reflects how little it understood what it had done wrong. Quickly assuring itself of God’s forgiveness, the church did not listen to the women to see if the apology was heard, let alone accepted.

Reconciliation

In an apology from the many to the many, reconciliation must intentionally be approached in ways that are systemic, structural and corporate. Reconciliation must be broad and extensive.[301] But within the United Church

[299] Marion Kirkwood, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Toronto, April 30, 2006.
[300] Wilma Cade, “Response to the United Church’s Apology.”
[301] Nicholas Tavuchis, Mea Culpa, *A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 100.

community, where many people know each other by name, the reconciliation needs to be relational too.

The nine members of the General Council Executive who were interviewed after the service were asked if they knew any disjoined women. The response was either directly “no” or a qualified, “perhaps.” Many expressed caution in answering because of their awareness that affected women are so invisible it is hard to say for sure. The four women attending the service played a representational role, embodying the wronged party. But the affected group is much larger. Without identifying those women it is virtually impossible to work at reconciliation from a relational basis.

No list or record of the disjoined women exists. Searching archival records could provide a partial list. Interviewing people with knowledge of deaconess history could add detail to the list. But this was not done. The General Council and Conference offices turned to the Centre for Christian Studies to provide them with a list of the women affected, and, the names of their families.[302] The school, with no responsibility for designating or disjoining deaconesses, did not have the data being sought. Using the school’s mailing list Bruce Gregerson, General Council Minister, sent a letter informing the graduates of the church’s intention to

[302] Email from Bruce Faurschou, Executive Secretary, Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario Conference to Caryn Douglas, Principal Centre for Christian Studies, February 11, 2006, Email from Debbie Johnson, Program Staff, Hamilton Conference, to Caryn Douglas, Principal Centre for Christian Studies, February 15, 2006, Email from Lillian Perigoe, Conference Personnel Minister, Toronto Conference, February 21, 2006 to Caryn Douglas, Principal Centre for Christian Studies, Email to Bruce Faurschou, Debbie Johnson and Bruce Gregersen, General Council Minister, from Caryn Douglas, Principal Centre for Christian Studies, February 16, 2006, Email to Lillian Perigoe from Caryn Douglas, Principal Centre for Christian Studies, February 21, 2006.

apologize and inviting the women's participation.[303] An appeal was made for women to identify themselves, or anyone else that they knew who was affected by the rule and to inform their regional Conference office.

Yvonne Wilke was one of the women who received the letter. She contacted London Conference office to indicate that she was a disjoined woman. She felt little interest in her story from the Executive Secretary and she was hurt by this lack of respect.[304] Perhaps other women contacted their Conference offices, similarly identifying themselves but Bruce Gregerson does not recall receiving any names.[305]

In the letter from Bruce Gregerson, women were also told that after they identified themselves to their Conference they would receive a letter from the Moderator.[306] But, no letter from the Moderator was ever sent.

Yvonne Wilke assumed that since she never received a letter from the Moderator, her name had never been passed on by the Conference office. There is no record of her name being forwarded. The failure of London Conference to follow through on its commitment diminished Yvonne's view of the church and

[303] Letter from Rev. Dr. Bruce Gregersen, General Council Minister, Programs for Mission and Ministry to all Centre for Christian Studies United Church graduates 1964 and prior, March, 2006.

[304] Yvonne Wilke, interview with Caryn Douglas, by telephone, January 20, 2009.

[305] Only four of the thirteen Conferences replied to my request for information. None of these Conferences forwarded names. The General Council files of the 2006 apology have already been sent to the archives and are not yet processed for public access. Bruce Gregerson does not recall receiving names from any Conferences. Bruce Gregerson, email to Caryn Douglas, February 17, 2009.

[306] The Executive directed "The Moderator to write to all women so identified [as affected by disjoining,] indicating the General Council's sincere regret over the policy and its implications." Executive of the General Council Minutes October 28 to October 31, 2006, 325.

contributed to her regret that, “the apology made me feel more hostile.”[307] Marion Kirkwood wondered why she did not receive a letter. “Perhaps the General Council considered what was said at the [apology service] sufficient … but that hardly seems good enough!”[308] The failure of the General Council to follow through on its commitment to have the Moderator write to the women further eroded the basis for the strong relationship needed for reconciliation.

London Conference is one of the three Conferences that held a regional apology and Yvonne Wilke was in attendance. She described the service as “disappointing.” She sat in the audience, and was never identified as one of the only two disjoined women in attendance. “I sat there and no one, even the people sitting right beside me, knew that they were talking about me. I didn’t feel like anyone was apologizing to me.”[309]

As individuals, the four women at the General Council Executive service felt some reconciliation from the apology experience. But the wrong that was being reckoned is a corporate one and transcends each individual occurrence, both in time and nature. Marion Kirkwood named that in order to be fully satisfied the apology needs to extend beyond their particular experience and address the larger systemic issues related to sexism in the church.

Marion drew on the work of theologian Carter Heyward as she assessed what remained undone. She explained that Heyward makes the point in her book

[307] Yvonne Wilke, interview by Caryn Douglas, by telephone, January 20, 2009.
[308] Marion Kirkwood, email to Caryn Douglas, December 12, 2008.
[309] Yvonne Wilke, interview by Caryn Douglas, by telephone, January 20, 2009.

Saving Jesus from Those Who Are Right:[310]

> that forgiveness is shallow unless there is a recognition that there is a change of heart *and* an intention to work for change. This work has to be done together, it is not just up to the victims to do it and it is not up to the people who perpetrated the insult to do it, but somehow as a community of faith, it has to be done together.[311]

The church gave no thought to allocating any resources to reparation, compensation, or strategic change. The women were not consulted about what action they might like to see as a tangible marker of apology. None of the disjoined women expected compensation for herself. They express a strong desire that the church invest in addressing ongoing sexism. Their explicit wish went unheeded.

Wilma Cade could not have been any more direct in her appeal to the church to accompany their words with action.

> When I have told friends about this Apology they have all retorted, "And what is the United Church going to do to repay these women?" We all laughed. If this Apology had been made 20 years ago, there would have been many women trained for ministry who were in financial difficulty. Now many have died and gone to their true reward. I wonder, however, if there are not still some struggling with very meager pensions. If the Church is truly sorry, would it be so difficult to check the records, and offer even a little help?[312]

She openly invited the church to look forward, not only backward. She asked people to make a connection between the discriminatory act of disjoining and the church's patterns today. Wilma said:

> It is not hard to look back 50 years and see injustices. The question

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[310] Carter Heyward, *Saving Jesus From Those Who are Right* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

[311] Marion Kirkwood, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Toronto, April 30, 2006.

[312] Wilma Cade, "Response to the United Church's Apology."

> is what are we doing today, that is unfair, prejudicial, insensitive, unloving? Women ministers in the United Church are now well accepted, unless they happen to be from a visible minority ... Could we not do more to prepare congregations and [visible minority] ministers for each other?[313]

One of the GCE members interviewed after the apology, a woman of colour, spoke strongly about the need for the church to move beyond its rhetoric. She said, "What I heard in this was an apology to white women." She particularly noted Wilma's comments about the contemporary difficulties for women ministers in the United Church who are from a visible minority.

> It is one thing to offer apologies, to say that injustice happened 60 years ago, but how does that affect the way we live now? How are we really going ... to repent? ... [Can we be] living in right relationship with those women who are struggling today?"[314]

An immediate opportunity for the Church to take action to address systemic sexism was lost. The GCE was preparing the Compensation Models Project report for the upcoming General Council meeting. The report examines compensation for United Church ministry personnel and reveals that women, on average, are not paid as much as men. The minimum salary scale does not guarantee equality in pay, more men are paid above the required minimum than women.[315] The report is very thin on recommendations to follow up with this revelation. Nothing emerged from the GCE to address this. No link was made between the issues that spawned the apology and ongoing conditions.

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[313] Wilma Cade, "Response to the United Church's Apology."

[314] Interviews conducted by Betsy Anderson, Caryn Douglas's Research , with General Council Executive Members, after the Apology to Disjoined Women, April 30, 2006.

[315] Steering Group on Compensation, Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services, "Compensation Models Project Report", General Council Workbook, 38th General Council of The United Church of Canada, 2006, pp Com 93 to Com 116.

The complete lack of attention to reconciliation in this case typifies what David Crocker calls “liberal social solidarity” where the willingness to truly hear each other is limited. The goal is related to mercy and forgiveness but does not encompass a commitment to justice or true reconciliation. Some individual or specific behaviours change but not systemic structures. Genuine reconciliation is marked by radical justice making and a commitment to go beyond the specific to address the long term, long range and systemic issues.[316] The GCE members interviewed made comments that the apology process “names injustices we are living” and that it “reflects the reality for the church, our willingness to explore our previous actions, not as something that is limited to the past” and that “ [the experience demonstrates that] we can make an adjustment as a church, we can change.”[317] Yet, only one of those interviewed indentified that the apology offered nothing in the way of a concrete plan, strategy or even vague commitment to continued work. The respondents were proud of what their church had done, but not very analytical about, or even aware of, its limitations.

In her sermon at the apology, Elizabeth Eberhart Moffatt cited disjoined woman Joan McDonald’s declaration that, “This acknowledgement must get into the books of the church but then we must get on with it. There are so many more important things to accomplish.”[318] The apology is in the official record of the

[316] David Crocker, "Reckoning With Past Wrongs: A Normative Framework," in Carol Prager and Trudy Govier, ed., *Dilemmas of Reconciliation Cases and Concepts (*Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2003), 53.

[317] Interviews conducted by Betsy Anderson, Caryn Douglas’s Research Assistant, with General Council Executive Members, after the Apology to Disjoined Women, April 30, 2006.

[318] Elizabeth Eberhart-Moffat, “Coming ‘Round to Ourselves.”

church. We did not “get on with things.”

Gospel

Sharing the gospel, or good news, is essential to moving more than the immediate participants in the apology toward transformation.

The apology is in the official records of the United Church. That is one way that the church’s story is told, but those records are not widely read. Jim Sinclair, the General Secretary of the United Church, wrote:

> This is a sad aspect of a vital chapter in our life as a denomination. Our hope is that by recognizing this particular aspect of the lives of those disjoined the larger story of their major contribution to the ministry of Jesus Christ may become more evident to everyone.[319]

But without much work to publicize the history of disjoining or the apology, neither is evident to very many people.

The United Church Observer carried an article on the disjoining and the apology.[320] It included stories about Ruth Lang and Joyce Scott and featured some of Ina Cavers’ story. Ina Cavers graduated from the program at Manitoba College in Winnipeg in 1929. At the time of this writing she is 100 years old and while her body is slowing down her memory is sharp. When Ina was a teen, her congregation was visited by a deaconess, “with her navy blue dress and little white collar.”[321] As she told them about her ministry with the urban poor, Ina

[319] Jim Sinclair, General Secretary of The United Church of Canada, email to Caryn Douglas, Principal Centre for Christian Studies, June 22, 2005.

[320] Donna Sinclair, "Set apart, then set aside," *The United Church Observer* (Toronto: Observer Publications, February 2006), 21.

[321] Ina Caton, Interview by Caryn Douglas, London, ON, May 28, 2005. The details in this

recognized a call to become a deaconess and serve with the Woman's Missionary Society. Upon graduation from the deaconess school, Ina had not yet reached the age of twenty-one, so she was too young for the WMS. Mrs. Grant, the WMS Secretary recommended she take another year of education. "I could have gone to Normal School," Ina explained, "but I didn't have any notion I was going to get married, I was going to do church work, so I followed the advice of Dr. McKay [the principal of the theological college] and took more theology." Ina took "bible with the boys" and that is how she met David Cavers, also a theology student. By the end of the year they were engaged. Ina postponed marriage however because, as she said, "I was bound to have an experience of my own – to stand on my own two feet." David completed his preparation for ordination and Ina served for a year in northern Alberta with the WMS. She was never designated a deaconess, but had a lifelong ministry as a minister's wife. For Ina, "Giving up being a deaconess might have been hard, if I hadn't still been going into the church." She is not bitter or even angry about the disjoining. She acknowledges that it was just the way things were for women back then. She also acknowledged that, "back then I accepted a lot I question today … I have read Spong's[322] books, and I agree with most of what he says …[theologically] things had to change and I'm happy I lived to see my daughter be a minister." Ina considered attending the apology service offered by London Conference, but at nearly 100, the distance was too great for her to travel.

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story are drawn from that interview.

[322] John Spong expresses a liberal theology that is critical of much of the Christian tradition in areas such as the treatment of women.

Elizabeth Eberhart-Moffatt, who preached at the apology, gifted the bowl and the stones from the service to the church. They now reside in the Moderator's office in the General Council offices in Toronto. The current Moderator, David Giuliano, told me that they were there, and that when he began his term as the Moderator he had to inquire about their origin and purpose.[323] During the conversation he suggested that some signage noting their story should be prepared. That would be one way to share the story with one of the senior leaders in the Church.

Spirit Connection, the United Church's television ministry, filmed part of the apology. They had no plans to make a program with the footage at the time that budget cutbacks ended the program.[324] The Centre for Christian Studies newsletter carried two articles, one leading up to the apology and a reflection on the apology experience.[325] Nothing on the topic has appeared in the newsletter of Diakonia of the United Church of Canada.

The church has not made much of this story to date. The good news may be hard to perceive, given the degree of lost opportunities in the process. This might be a deterrent to sharing it with others. But the stories can become good news in ways and places that could not have been anticipated. In an act of faith, the church could risk telling the story, trusting in God's resurrection promise of new life.

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[323] David Giuliano, conversation with Caryn Douglas, Toronto, May 2, 2008.
[324] *Spirit Connection* was ended in June 2007.
[325] Caryn Douglas, "Ministry or Marriage?" *Tapestry* (Winnipeg: Centre for Christian Studies, Fall 2006) ; Marion Kirkwood, "Ministry or Marriage? Part 2," *Tapestry* (Winnipeg: Centre for Christian Studies, Fall 2006).

Metanoia

The two key players identified in this story of the disjoining and apology are the women who were affected by the rule and The United Church of Canada. Both parties have the potential to cite metanoia out of the experience, but I do not think that the church could sincerely identify any. The church's engagement in the processes of lament, call, confession, parable, forgiveness, reconciliation and gospel was insufficient to lead to any turning. Individuals within the church may identify transformations. I am not aware of anyone making that claim. The affected women, at least some of them, do name an experience of conversion.

Marion Kirkwood, one of the women affected by the disjoining reflected on the change in her self understanding in recent years. Marion was never a deaconess. Being forced to decide between marriage and designation, she chose marriage. Later, when married women could become deaconesses, the option to join just did not present itself in her imagination. She never thought of herself as being in diaconal ministry. But recently the diaconal community invited her to claim that identity for herself. And she has. The apology and the experience around it is only one part of the reason for her decision to see herself as a diaconal minister, but it has contributed to her turning toward a new self-understanding, and increased her participation in the diaconal community. It is a metanoia.[326]

I am another identifiable player. I have been significantly changed as a

[326] Marion Kirkwood, group interview by Caryn Douglas, Toronto, April 30, 2006.

result of the disjoining apology. My own experience is explored in the next chapter.

The act of this apology may one day have greater meaning in the life of the United Church; effects of this action may be yet to come. If the way to true repentance and embodied transformation is a process, its end lies over the horizon.

Chapter 7

REFLECTION AND WORK AHEAD

Call and response is a popular style of African gospel singing. A plaintive, evocative call is followed by a lyrical and melodic response. Without the response the call is lost, for there is no chorus for it to play to. This provides a helpful metaphor to examine the disjoining apology. The United Church issued a call to the women affected, through the motion of the General Council. The call was to join in the opportunity for reckoning. But it was not very strong; it was not rooted well in lament. When the women finally heard it they responded with some humming, but were not prepared or ready to burst into resounding chorus.

The response of the women was muted. They had already surrendered their resentment. They had done whatever forgiving they might have perceived was needed. They had largely done their healing work by "getting on with our lives."[327] They did, however, give voice to a chorus asking the church to focus on addressing the injustices for women today.

The church's call was not only directed to these women. It was directed to itself. But no hearty response emerged from the church. It answered with formality. It followed the notes on the page for a one time rendering of the chorus. It did not engage, as African singers do, in a plethora of harmony born out of repetition and understanding. The church did not respond in grace

[327] Joyce Scott, Interview by Caryn Douglas, Sydney, BC, February 27, 2006.

because it was called. It responded in law, because it was contractually obliged. An apology motivated by obligation is far less likely to progress to metanoia because conversion involves a commitment of the heart. The road from duty to passion is long. Without passion the chance for true change was largely lost.

Russell Daye asks, “Can an apology impede justice?”[328] He concludes it will not, *if* there is a commitment to a transitional framework that will take all the parties from a place of obligation to engagement.[329] The church missed the opportunity here to establish that process.

The reckoning of wrongs, once named publically, can only be addressed when a process is established and enacted. The process must carry the parties from lament to truth telling, must hold them in confession and forgiveness, must support them in reconciling and sharing the good news. The quality of the process is important. The very injustices being addressed were initiated and perpetuated by the systemic processes now being called to address them. A system that did not recognize the injustice of disjoining may be ill equipped to give the complaint voice. Certainly, without a process of significant self-assessment and honest, rigorous reflection, the system is disinclined to repent sincerely.[330] The church’s reflection was limited and shallow.

In the constellation of misogynistic theologies, sexist attitudes and unjust

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[328] Russell Daye, *Political Forgiveness Lessons from South Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 10.

[329] Russell Daye, *Political Forgiveness,* 16.

[330] David Crocker, "Reckoning With Past Wrongs: A Normative Framework," in Carol Prager and Trudy Govier, ed. *Dilemmas of Reconciliation Cases and Concepts*. (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2003), 50.

practices, disjoining is a bright star. It contributed to the diminishment of women's ministries. It impeded their leadership. It weakened their community. It fractured their organizing for change. It altered their economic status.

But, disjoining did not outshine the women. Disjoined woman, Joyce Scott, says so well, "even though it was hard and we were denied access, we were ministers."[331] Despite the injustices of sexism, the women made a difference. There is good news to tell.

Systemic United Church Problems Revealed in the Apology Process

The missed opportunities in this story often resulted because of systemic problems in the way the United Church operates. The apology was given to staff for implementation, consistent with the model in use in the General Council offices. In this case it was problematic in three regards. Firstly, there were insufficient resources of time for the staff to properly carry out the work. Secondly, the staff was left alone to be representative of the church. It can be easy then to find fault with the staff and miss the opportunity for a broader analysis of problems in the church. Thirdly, it was a missed opportunity to draw on the passion and energy within the church's membership to address injustices like sexism. There are people within the church craving to do this kind of ministry.

The heart in the apology process was found in places like Elizabeth Eberhart-Moffat's sermon, the reflections of the General Council Executive members when they were interviewed after the apology, the conversation among

[331] Joyce Scott, Interview by Caryn Douglas, Sydney, BC, February 27, 2006.

the United Church Training School graduates at their reunion. These moments are characterized by relationship and reflection. New church structures that streamline decision making have been implemented as efficiencies. But, the efficiency is a false one if the decisions are not rooted in reflection and relationship. The movement of the petition through the court structures gives just one example of something not right about the way we are doing things as a church. Deeper reflection on the processes of decision making and implementation in this case might help to delineate the core problems, the issues that underlay the failings in the system.

Parallels drawn between the 1950s and today could inform the church on persistent weaknesses in its structure. The church was poor then at drawing on its own insights. It was as if the left hand did not know what the right hand was doing. The tendency was for decision makers to ignore the prophetic in its own midst. This is exactly what happened in the 2006 General Council Executive meeting. The call to address the legacy of colonialism and the revelation of gender based pay inequity were not connected with the issues of the disjoining. Something is wrong with the way things are done.

Further Work that Could Be Done

Opportunities to grapple with the disjoining apology remain. Fulfilling the commitments already voiced offers a starting place. Meaningful initiatives engaging the heart and spirit of the community could be undertaken.

A. Making the Story Accessible

It is not too late for the church to do truth telling and share the good news about disjoining, about the work and witness of deaconesses, about the apology. Bruce Gregerson, General Council Minister, Programs for Mission and Ministry and Kim Uyede-Kai, General Council Minister, Racial Justice and Gender Justice, have responded positively to my advocation to produce an educational resource on disjoining and the apology. We have made commitments to further the conversation and prepare a proposal to go into the church's work and budget planning where a final decision would be made. There is agreement that I would be involved in the development of the resource, if it should proceed.

The resource might incorporate the 25 minute video/DVD, *Holy Matrimony Unholy Disjoining*, which I produced after the apology service. In the program, the four women in attendance at the service share their reflections on their experience of disjoining and their reactions to the apology. I have developed a short study guide to accompany it. My intention has always been to distribute the DVD throughout the church. With the hope that the church would take on that responsibility, I have held off. If the church does not proceed with further educational work, I will fulfill my intention.

B. Following Through on the Commitments Made

1. Letter from the Moderator The General Council Executive directed the Moderator to write to the women who could be identified as disjoined. This has not happened, but my advocacy on the issue has been successful in getting

a commitment from Bruce Gregerson to make it happen.[332] I developed a plan for identifying affected diaconal women and presented it. I indicated my willingness to enact the plan. I am awaiting a response to the proposal. I will continue to monitor that this work is done.

2. A permanent memorial Both the Moderator, David Giuliano, and Bruce Gregerson are interested in creating a memorial plaque to accompany the bowl and the stones from the apology service. Currently, the bowl is in the Moderator's office. It could be moved into a more prominent location in Church House. A service of dedication for the memorial could be held as one opportunity to share the story. Perhaps the service could be incorporated into a future General Council Executive meeting. The Program Units and other committees of the General Council could be strongly encouraged to incorporate education and reflection on the disjoining. The bowl and stones could be used in worship in these contexts.

C. Concrete Reparation

It is not too late for the church to redress its sexist history with action. The victims of this injustice have indicated it would bring them satisfaction if the church made some commitment to make things better for women today. Marion Kirkwood, one of the affected women, says it clearly:

> We can note this apology, but can we really accept it completely as long as there is still so much sexism and hierarchy in the church? I wonder if the organizational changes at the national church provide as much support to women in ministry as the former structure? I

[332] Bruce Gregerson, General Council Minister, Programs for Mission and Ministry, email to Caryn Douglas, February 9, 2009.

> wonder about Presbytery and Conference student committees that do not put forward diaconal ministry as a valid choice for potential candidates? Or ministers who advise young women to go for ordination because “you are too talented to be a diaconal minister”. I invite us to consider how affirming we are of women of visible minorities, or of women with disabilities.[333]

The church could truly listen to the women and their response to its apology. It could commit resources to further work on at least one issue or question from Marion’s observations or from those others have articulated along the way.

D. Symbolic Reparation

Reparation in corporate apologies often includes a symbolic gesture, as a visible sign of the less easily seen systemic work that is also required. The church could enter into dialogue with some of the disjoined women to discern an appropriate symbol. Perhaps a bursary for married, female candidates for diaconal ministry, or sponsoring a series of conferences on sexism in the church over the next decade, or commissioning a book on the ministry of United Church deaconesses.

E. Further Research

1. Deaconesses who did not marry This study focuses on the experience of the deaconesses who married and were disjoined. But almost half of the women entering the order never married and committed their entire working lives to their vocation.[334] Further work could be done to document their

[333] Marion Kirkwood, "Ministry or Marriage? Part 2," *Tapestry* (Winnipeg: Centre for Christian Studies, Fall 2006), 7.

[334] Committee on Diaconal Ministry, *History of Diaconal Ministry in The United Church of Canada, 1925-1991.* (Toronto: Division of Ministry Personnel and Education, The United Church of Canada, 1991) 12.

experience, including their view of the disjoining rule and the affect it had on them.

2. Diaconal History after 1964 Mary Anne MacFarlane's thorough history of the Deaconess Order[335] ends in 1964 when deaconesses became members of Presbytery and responsibility for the Order was diffused through church courts.[336] In my archival research on disjoining I only examined the records up to this period. The story of reinstatement would be enriched by greater documentation of decision making processes in the period after 1964.

Staff support for the Order and the national committee also disappeared in 1964, along with the focus they provided for advocacy and education on diaconal ministry. Twenty years later a new committee was created and staff support reinstated. In 1999, they were eliminated in a church restructuring. A thorough history of the Order up the present is needed to record the story and provide the context for more deeply understanding the patterns of discrimination in diaconal ministry.

3. Ordained Women The apology of the church was also to women in the ordained stream who were affected by its marriage bar and restrictions. There were less than 30 women ordained in the United Church before the church changed its policies. To my knowledge, no one has investigated their stories, or

[335] Mary Anne MacFarlane, "A Tale of Handmaidens: Deaconesses in The United Church of Canada, 1925 to 1964" (MA thesis, University of Toronto, 1987).

[336] The Committee on Diaconal Ministry history book draws extensively on Mary Anne MacFarlane's thesis. It extends the story to 1991, but the material between 1964 and 1991 is not as thoroughly documented. Committee on Diaconal Ministry, *History of Diaconal Ministry in The United Church of Canada 1925 – 1991* (Toronto: Division of Ministry Personnel and Education, The United Church of Canada, 1991).

the stories of the women who were unable to be ordained. No one has advocated on their behalf. The church could take initiative to address this group of women it apologized to.

4. The First Nations Apologies The United Church apologies to First Nations people shaped the denomination. This shaping is ongoing. Much has been learned, much learning lies ahead. The disjoining apology proceeded without reference to these apologies. In 1986 the First Nation people told the church they needed time to decide their response to the apology. They tried to teach the church the difference between accepting and acknowledging an apology. The wisdom of this teaching was not transferred to the disjoining apology. Learning happens when we reflect on our experience. Has the church reflected enough to learn from their experience? Documenting and deepen analysis on these apologies would benefit the church.

My Journey from Lament to Metanoia

I was called to do this work of telling the story of disjoining and the apology. I believe that calling has been affirmed by the community. The call is deep, and my lament for the way that deaconesses were treated is sharp. When I was a student at the Centre for Christian Studies in the 1980s I somehow learned of the disjoining practice. Like the young women in my research course, I had no idea that marriage bars existed. My astonished angst led to writing a paper in

which I contended the United Church had a rule of celibacy for deaconesses.[337] The professor invited me to be on a panel at a conference where I shared the history and my ideas. My public truth telling began.

I wrote that paper before I had a computer, and a half dozen moves later, I do not have a copy, much to my regret. I do remember one disjoined woman I tried to interview did not want to talk about it. For her, there was nothing to say, disjoining was simply a product of the times. I also remember speaking to Katharine Hockin,[338] who had a different perspective. She identified the church's sexism and heterosexism. She was angry but she laughed too. She told me how the women used covert strategies for undermining the church's power. They mentored each other about what to say to the Woman's Missionary Society psychologist during their interviews for candidacy. When he predictably asked if they would chose marriage if they had the chance, they all knew to say "Of course," whether they meant it or not.

Katharine's story was formative in shaping my understanding of diaconal ministry. Diaconal ministry is about resilience, and it is about community. It is about analysis and strategy. It is about laughter and outrage. It is about living as if the magnificat promise were true: God *has* brought down the powerful from their thrones. (Luke 1:52) My call is to evangelize this good news.

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[337] I would not make the argument to describe the Order as celibate today.

[338] Katharine Hockin was a deaconess/diaconal minister. She served in China with the WMS and taught at the United Church Training School. She was a champion of social justice, an articulate missiologist and a feisty character. She died in 1993. See Mary Rose Donnelly and Heather Dau, *Katharine* (Winfield, BC: Wood Lake Books, 1992).

My interest in this story has done more to share the news than anything intentionally structured by the institutional church. I want to remember that the work I have done is the work of the church. I am the church, and my actions individually, are also the actions of the church. As a well known past principal of a theological school I am viewed as an authoritative representative of the church. My personal and professional identities are merged for many people who encounter me, particularly for the diaconal school graduates. For many people I represent more than just me.

The first question I asked the disjoined women after the apology service was, “Why did you come?” and they all answered, “Because you asked me.” My influence and intervention with the women was significant in supporting them to make the decision to participate. I will continue to use my resources, my power, my privilege, my voice to empower others to share in this work and to tell this story.

I would rather that the apology had been undertaken with risk and courage and with a trust in grace to help assuage the fear. But I am not sorry that the apology took place. It has been a catalyst for immense enrichment of my life. Getting to know better many of the foremothers of my community has deepened my sense of belonging. Encountering the pain of disjoining moistened my heart. Witnessing the resiliency of courageous women has challenged my fears. Engaging in advocacy and education within the structures has sharpened my skills and taught me new strategies. Participating in the apology service humbled

me and fostered in me a new attentiveness to the importance of apology. Plunged into the minutia of archival detail I have soaked up deaconess history and my self understanding as a diaconal minister has been refreshed.

Have I experienced metanoia, that turning to embrace something new? I think so. I am more convinced than ever that the gains women have made are precarious. The apathy that had settled in to my being has been shoved aside with a renewed commitment to work against sexism. I do not want to miss the opportunity.

Final Words

This is a story. "The truth about stories is that is all we are. You don't have anything if you don't have stories."[339]

After a particularly passionate rendering of the disjoining story a listener said to me, "Well, it isn't like it's as serious as apartheid." I am not interested in playing a game of "my injustice is bigger than yours," but the comment opened a window of insight for me. Women's stories are easily dismissed. Disjoining is an illustration in the multiple volume history of the systemic injustice perpetrated against women for millennia. For the women disjoining shut out of opportunities to share their passion, exercise their leadership, embody their vocation, it was serious.

Telling the story is vital as a strategy to disempower the dismissal. The times that women have been able to break free of patriarchal holds and be in

[339] Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories: a native narrative* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2003), 2.

ministry are few. The deaconess story is one of these. It is an awesome story, so awesome that the church used its power to keep the movement under control. Power was deployed through disjoining.

For decades the inherent sexism of Canadian culture cloaked the church's injustices toward its women workers. But for a period of nearly 20 years, beginning in the early 1950s, the church ignored its own gains in understanding. Policies were slow to change and old practices were sustained. So many opportunities were overlooked. The affected women deserve the church's apology. The whole church suffered through this diminishment of women's full participation. The church has reason to lament.

The apology to disjoined women largely failed in addressing the historic wrong. It completely failed in making the connections to the continuing barriers for women in all aspects of church leadership. Disjoining failed the women. The apology failed them too. More lost opportunities. Thankfully, small moments of grace reveal the hope of God's promise of resurrection. Conversion within the church to a new commitment to eradicate sexism could still come, but it will take work.

When the disciples took up a conversation with the stranger on the Emmaus road they had no inkling it would end by witnessing the risen Christ. (Luke 24:13-32) The stories that the stranger told captivated their attention. Passionate stories of the history of a broken but faithful people kept them in relationship long enough to have a life changing insight. My hope lies in sharing

the stories, the story of the disjoining, and the story of the apology, so that one day the community of the United Church will come to be changed.

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Omega Bula
Wilma (Unwin) Cade
Charlotte Caron
Ina Caton
Virginia Coleman
Ted Dodd
Elizabeth Eberhart-Moffatt
Mae (Walker) Gracey
Ruth (Sandilands) Lang
Margaret Hetherington
Marion (Woods) Kirkwood
Joanne Kury
Verna (Crooks) McKay
Doug McMurtry
Sally Meyer
Dorothy Naylor
Gloria (Kilpatrick) Nettle
Joan (Davies) Sandy
Joyce (McMaster) Scott
Carol Stevenson-Seller
Oriole (Vane) Veldhuis
Yvonne (Clipperton) (Vanslyke) Wilke
Joan (Cheesman) Willis
Margaret (Brown) Wonfor
Members of the General Council Executive

APPENDIX 1

38th General Council
August 2003
Wolfville, NS

Petition 66

Title:	Apology to United Church Deaconesses and Ordained Women Clergy
Submitted by:	Hamilton Conference
Session Action:	
Presbytery Action:	
Conference Action:	Concurrence
Original Source:	Elizabeth Eberhart-Moffat and Betty Bridgman

WHEREAS the policy of the United Church of Canada formerly mandated that deaconesses and ordained women clergy relinquish their rights to practice ministry if and when they married; and

WHEREAS we now hear and acknowledge the pain of these stories and the denial of the gifts in the cases of these women; and

WHEREAS our evolving consciousness as a church has recognized the injustice of former policies in relation to other groups, such as our Native Peoples and Japanese Canadians and have issued formal apologies; and

WHEREAS we as a church have historically committed ourselves to the goals of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, The Decade to Overcome Violence and have sought through our creed to 'seek justice and resist evil', even the evil of sexism

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 38th General Council find a way on our behalf to formally apologize to these women and express our sorrow for the loss of their leadership to the church.

Commission B amended this petition & it was carried as follows:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 38th General Council find a way on our behalf to ~~formally apologize~~ offer our sincere regret to these women and express our sorrow for the loss of their leadership to the church.

APPENDIX 2

A Service of Apology and Appreciation to Women in Ministry
Affected by the Disjoining Rule
The Executive of the General Council
April 30, 2006

Presider: The Very Rev. Marion Pardy

Call to Worship:

We have gathered to worship God.
We have come seeking comfort,
inspiration, community and insight.
We have come to open ourselves
to the power of God's presence in our midst.
We have come to offer up the seasons
and turnings of our lives,
and to ask God's help
in our learning and our growing.

Celebrate God's Presence

Hymn 387 Loving Spirit

Opening Prayer:

In your image, O God, we are created.
Be with us as we reflect that image
in our work and play, as we sing and pray,
study and learn, laugh and cry together.
Help us accept our responsibility
as members of this church
and as followers of the Way of Jesus Christ.
We ask for the encouragement of your Spirit
and the energy of your love.
Amen.

Susan Lukey
from Celebrate God's Presence (as adapted)

Hymn 16: Mary, Woman of Promise

Hebrew Scripture: 2 Kings 22:14-20 – *The Prophet Huldah* — Marion Kirkwood

The Wisdom: 893 *Wisest One, Radiant One*

The Acts 9:36-42 – *The Raising of Tabitha* — Wilma Cade

The Gospel: Matthew 26:6-13 – *The Faithful One*

Reflection: — Elizabeth Eberhart-Moffat

Hymn 590: *A Prophet-Woman Broke a Jar*

Prayer for Repentance and Forgiveness

God of grace and God of history
in your image we are created
and by Your mercy, we are responsible for our actions.
We come before you, as the United Church of Canada
to publicly repent for our wrongdoings
to the Deaconesses and Ordained women of our denomination.

O God, we call.
O God we call.
From deep inside we yearn.
From deep inside we yearn for you.
(sung prayer, Voices United #411)

We grieve over our limited and culturally conditioned vision of the women's call to serve You.
We are sorry for the policies and practices which denied their ministry and gifts.
We repent of the injustices that left many women unemployed, in poverty, and shut out from the courts.
We recant the sexism that continues to creep quietly and steadily into our views and practices towards women generally and women in ministry.

O God, we call.
O God we call.
From deep inside we yearn.
From deep inside we yearn for you.

Open your church to the truths of its past in regard to "women in ministry".
Heal the individual and corporate wounds of our practices.
Pour out your wisdom to understand a better way.
Empower the church to create policies and live practices that are just, respectful and celebrative of women.

O God, we call.
O God we call.
From deep inside we yearn.
From deep inside we yearn for you.

God is a God of grace and a God of history.
We are created in God's image and we are responsible.
By God's mercy the church is forgiven.
By God's mercy we are able to be transformed
By God's mercy we are committed
to honour all women's ministries
and to policies and practices of justice towards all people.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

Joan K. McMurtry

Woman's Creed

I BELIEVE IN GOD
who created woman and man in God's own image
who created the world and gave both sexes the care of the earth.

I BELIEVE IN JESUS
child of God, chosen of God, born of the woman Mary
who listened to women and liked them
who stayed in their homes
who discussed justice with them
who was followed and financed by woman disciples.

I BELIEVE IN JESUS
who discussed theology with a woman at a well
and first confided in her his messiahship
who motivated her to go and tell her great news to the city.

I BELIEVE IN JESUS
who received anointing from a woman
who rebuked the men guests who scorned her
who said this woman will be remembered
for what she did to minister to Jesus.

I BELIEVE IN JESUS
who healed a woman on the Sabbath
and made her whole because she was a human being.

I BELIEVE IN JESUS who spoke of God as a woman seeking the lost coin as a woman who swept,
seeking the lost.

I BELIEVE IN JESUS
who thought of pregnancy and birth with reverence
not as punishment but a wrenching event
a metaphor for transformation
born again anguish-into-joy.

I BELIEVE IN JESUS
who spoke of himself as a mother hen
who would gather her chicks under her wing.

I BELIEVE IN JESUS
who appeared first to Mary Magdalene
who sent her with the bursting message.

GO AND TELL.

I BELIEVE IN THE WHOLENESS OF THE SAVIOR
in whom there is neither Jew nor Greek
slave nor free male nor female
for we are all one in salvation.

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT
as she moves over the waters of creation and over the earth.

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT
the woman spirit of God
who like a hen created us and gave us birth
and covers us with her wings.

Rachel C. Wahlberg
from Prayers & Poems, Songs & Stories
Ecumenical Decade: Churches in Solidarity With Women

Words of Appreciation and Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Right Rev. Peter Short

Words of Response: Wilma Cade

Hymn 899: *My Soul Gives Glory to My God*

The Blessing:

Return now to our world with its pain and wonder,
remembering the words of the prophets,
the faithfulness of Mary,
and the longing of all
who yearn for a sign of hope.
And may the blessing of God who is ever faithful,
the blessing of Christ who still comes to us,
and the blessing of the Holy Spirit who moves within us
and throughout our world,
rest upon us and abide with us, this day and forevermore.
Amen.

Marion Pardy
from Worship For All Seasons, Volume 1, CGP

APPENDIX 3

RESPONSE TO THE UNITED CHURCH'S APOLOGY AND APPRECIATION TO WOMEN IN MINISTRY AFFECTED BY THE DISJOINING RULE
APRIL 30, 2006 GENERAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE

I am astonished to witness this event! Thank you for the invitation to respond. On behalf of nobody in particular, because who is authorized to speak for all these disjoined women, I thank you for this apology and appreciation to the women in ministry affected by the Disjoining rule. The desire to address old wounds and injustices is much appreciated. This worship has been deeply moving. Words have power, words can heal, words can illuminate. Thank you for good words.

In the last week, as I reflected on today's event, I experienced a kaleidoscope of emotions. My initial indifference - after all it was a long time ago and life has travelled on - began to evaporate as memories returned. I remembered the grief, the anger. All of my friends have had very bitter experiences in the church. About 25 years ago the deaconesses were gathered for some decision making at Cedar Glen. What astonished and distressed many was the out pouring of pain, the feelings of rejection and marginalization. Many professional women returned to earlier careers. Most gave countless hours of quality leadership for free.

The Disjoining was really the tip of the iceberg. In the local church and in the courts while it was nice to be a woman in ministry, it was nicer to be a man. In 1960, after my first induction, the minister announced the hymn "Turn Back O Man Forswear Thy Foolish Ways". He may have had a point.

When I have told friends about this Apology they have all retorted, "And what is the United Church going to do to repay these women?" We all laughed. If this Apology had been made 20 years ago, there would have been many women trained for ministry who were in financial difficulty. Now many have died and gone to their true reward. I wonder, however, if there are not still some struggling with very meagre pensions. If the Church is truly sorry, would it be so difficult to check the records, and offer even a little help?

It is not hard to look back 50 years and see injustices. The question is what are we doing today, that is unfair, prejudicial, insensitive, unloving. Women ministers in the United Church are now well accepted, unless they happen to be from a visible minority. 50 years ago we were still sending missionaries to Korea, now they are sending us ministers. How gracefully do we receive them into our typical congregation? Could we not do more to prepare congregations and ministers for each other?

In conclusion, besides the indifference, grief, and anger, I have also experienced affirmation. As I have recalled the work done by my class mates in Africa, Hong Kong, Japan, India, the Caribbean, and Canada, I am proud to be part of this ministry. As I reflect on the contribution to our Church made by those who received no remuneration, I give thanks for their sacrifice and devotion. I remember with gratitude the leadership of Harriet Christie, Jean Hutcheson, and Katharine Hockin. I have been blessed to be in such a company.

It would not be appropriate for me to accept this Apology from the Church, as I cannot speak for others. However, I will say that I forgave the United Church this disjoining many years ago. The fact that I have a loving and supporting husband and terrific children makes this much easier. Also I have been fortunate in finding rewarding work in the Church. Over the years Christ has been much more faithful to me than I have been to him. In times of distress, I simply remember that Jesus had much more trouble than this with the religious establishment!

May Christ's Spirit lead us all in the way of justice and compassion.

Wilma M. Cade