

**MOUNTAIN MOVING WOMEN:
A STUDY OF STRUCTURAL AND SYSTEMIC CHANGE
FOR JUSTICE IN THE CHURCH**

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by

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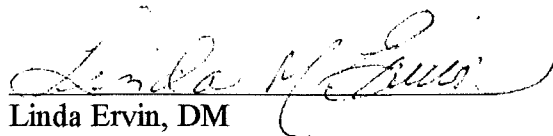
MASTER OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES
IN DIACONAL MINISTRY PROGRAM

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Council of St. Stephen's College for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Mountain Moving Women: A Study of Structural and Systemic Change for Justice in the Church*, presented by Barbara Ann Lloyd in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Theological Studies in Diaconal Ministry.

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Dedicated to Andrea and Mark
in the hope of a more just world.

ABSTRACT

This research examines how structural and systemic change for justice comes about in the church by studying the development and implementation of the Women in Ministry staff position in the United Church of Canada. The work can be included in the bodies of literature pertaining to women in ministry, feminist and research methodology theory. Using feminist qualitative methods, six participants were interviewed for their participation in the change process. Factors that effect successful change for justice were revealed and analysed. These include: the social and institutional climate of the day; the existence of supportive people in key leadership positions; the development of strategies that challenged existing structures and systems; and the intentionality of the change group in undertaking social analysis, theological reflection and group maintenance. Where transformation for justice is needed in congregations, presbyteries, conferences or General Council Divisions, this study has application for diaconal ministry as it affirms a vision of community and an empowering style of ministry for justice.

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For all the special friends and sister travellers on the journey, who have encouraged and nurtured me, and continue to inspire me, I am deeply grateful.

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*We are mountain moving women
Called by justice to awake.
In the Spirit's gentle power
And the strength of our love,
The earth shall be remade.*

Sandi Moore, 1985.

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

*The people I love the best
jump into the work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.¹*

This study concentrates on the development and implementation of the Women in Ministry (WIM) staff position, in the United Church of Canada, as an example of structural and systemic change for justice in the church. By studying how the Women In Ministry Committee staff position was created, I have learned how successful change for justice happens. This study has application for diaconal ministry in the areas of structural and systemic support by congregations for women in leadership, for women ministry personnel, and for women working for justice within their community and in mission outreach. Initiatives that might arise from these applications are: special educational programs; intentional support or advocacy through Ministry and Personnel Committees and Presbytery Pastoral Relations Committees; guidelines for effective monitoring and critique of church courts that might be used by regional women's advocacy groups.

The mandate of the Women in Ministry Overview Group (WIMOG) and the Women In Ministry Committee, during the time on which this study is focused, was "to identify and clarify personal and structural issues arising due to the increasing numbers of women in the ministry personnel pool of the United Church of Canada."² The work done to educate,

¹ Marge Piercy, "To Be Of Use" in Cries of the Spirit: A Celebration of Women's Spirituality ed. Marilyn Sewell, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 172,173.

² The Evaluation Task Group, "Evaluation of the Women in Ministry Committee", (Winnipeg: Division of Ministry Personnel and Education, United Church of Canada, 1989), 6.

advocate for and bring about systemic and structural change for women, as it related to issues such as sexual harassment, maternity leave, stress, personnel policy, decision making in the courts, and faculty positions in theological schools, characterized these groups as actively justice-seeking. One of the criteria for group membership was that people "... have an openness to the methods and perspectives of feminist theology."³ Work was done to create a bibliography of feminist theological resources. Clearly, WIMOG and the WIM committee understood themselves as working against sexism and patriarchy with and on behalf of women.

The need for a staff person within the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education, to advocate for and support women in ministry, was identified by the Women In Ministry Overview Group (WIMOG) in 1983. Research conducted between 1982 and 1983 revealed specific information about women's experiences in ministry at a time when the number of women had doubled over five years.⁴ Major issues such as preparation for ministry, functioning and support in ministry, and sexual harassment, among others, were identified as problematic for women entering and working in ministry vocations. The WIMOG itself had a mandate to support and advocate for increased attention to the issues and concerns of women in salaried ministries; to monitor the effect of the systems and structures of the church on women in ministry; and to support and encourage communication among women.⁵

Implications, from their work and the research, indicated that numerous committees and personnel in presbyteries, conferences and at the national level, who had specific areas of responsibility for ministry, needed to prepare the church for the affirmation and support of women in ministry.⁶ A staff position was developed by WIMOG, implemented by the newly

³ Glenys Huws, "The Evaluation Report of the Women in Ministry Overview Group to the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education Executive", (February, 1983), 3.

⁴ Janet Silman, "Women In Ministry Research Report" (Toronto: Women In Ministry Overview Group, DMPE, 1984), i.

⁵ Janet Silman, "Women In Ministry Research Report", ii.

⁶ Ibid, 73.

formed Women in Ministry Committee (1984), and filled in 1984 by Ann Naylor.

Today, many congregations continue to function and worship within patriarchal frameworks. There is still a lack of community consciousness or willingness to examine power dynamics related to gender, race and class. An ideology of liberal individualism inhibits social analysis. Women's spirituality and liberation, as well as men's, are stifled by transcendent theologies, exclusive language and the domination of men on church committees. All these aspects of patriarchy have a disempowering effect on prophetic action for social justice. People fail to see themselves as agents of God, and therefore, moral agents of change. The congregation often acts as a protector of the status quo - economically, socially and politically, and does not fulfil its prophetic role in the world. Many women also fear naming their own spirituality, claiming God in their image and challenging the male/female power imbalance in their relationships. From theology, to spirituality, to ethics, this present intransigence blocks the church from the salvation God intends for it and the world.

Feminist praxis offers liberative critical alternatives to patriarchy. In the visioning, practice, reflection and theory of feminist process in community, the experiences of all, but especially those marginalized by patriarchy, inform decision-making and community development. Many women, and others on the margins, as well as those with positions of power, authority and privilege, begin to understand how they are victims, oppressors and complicit in a system of domination. If patriarchy is dismantled in our personal relationships and social systems, a vision of humanity that is life-giving becomes possible for all, not just an elite few. Power is shared and those with authority can be held accountable. Each person and each part of nature is valued as an important and interdependent aspect of God's creation. Instead of fear, greed, and violence - love, peace and justice are possible.

In summary, the purpose of this study is to examine how structural and systemic change for justice comes about in the church.

My interest in this topic arose from the context of my work in diaconal ministry as a Staff Associate in a large urban congregation. Presently, I work with the challenges of raising feminist consciousness, encouraging social analysis, and facilitating personal and political change within my congregation. But, my interest in change for justice developed from a long history of action and education for organizational change, starting within the education system. I eventually began to imagine the church as something other than the irrelevant, conflicted and unjust institution that I was experiencing. I wanted a place where my growing awareness of women's spirituality and feminist liberation theology could find a nurturing celebratory home. I found "ecclesia", spirit-filled community, at the Centre For Christian Studies, in groups working for justice, in pockets of congregations. But, for the most part, I found great resistance to change, to liberation, to transformative process and thinking.

I carry with me the memory and "taste" of what could be. I actively work to be prophetic and empowering of the laity in the diaconal ministry I do in the congregation. That "taste" and my accountability to women and other marginalized peoples push me to discover more effective ways of consciousness raising, of doing social analysis, of organizing for social change. I wonder how I can be pastoral, prophetic and patient!

I have used qualitative research methodology, based on feminist values of praxis and dialogue, to study change for justice within church structures. To guide me in the formulation of research questions and analysis of data, I consulted a focus group comprised of three women working in diaconal ministry. I have read archival material and interviewed six individuals for data collection. Throughout this study, I refer to these individuals as "participants".

CHAPTER 2.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In my study of structural and systemic social change for justice, I have reviewed literature in the areas of women in ministry, feminist, and research methodology theory. By examining the theoretical and strategic work represented in this literature, I have learned more about women's lives within communities of resistance and how prophetic transformation has evolved.

WOMEN IN MINISTRY

A review of feminist literature on women in ministry essentially reveals that women historically have been strong in prophetic church ministries. To be prophetic is to name the truth of present reality in light of the vision of the "kin-dom"¹ in our midst.

Women's voices, finally heard and documented, speak of the tug and pull of women in the church today; voices excited by emerging feminist theologies and practices, passionate about justice, yet, stifled by the very institution that should exist for its own and the world's liberation/salvation (Steffenson Hagan, 1995; Winter, Lummis and Stokes, 1994; The Mud Flower Collective, 1985).

Feminist visions of church community, or "ecclesia", that integrate spirituality with

¹ Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, En La Lucha, In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), xi.

Isasi-Diaz explains her use of this term. "Two reasons compel me not to use the usual word employed by English Bibles, *kingdom*. First, it is obviously a sexist word that presumes that God is male. Second, the concept of kingdom in our world today is both hierarchical and elitist. The same reasons hold for not using *reign*. The word *kin-dom* makes it clear that when the fullness of God becomes a day-to-day reality in the world at large, we will all be sisters and brothers – kin to each other. This terminology was suggested to me by Georgette Wilson, O.S.F."

justice, and hospitality with mutuality spring from many of these works (Rhodes, 1987; Russell, 1993; Lebans, 1994). Perspectives vary depending on the entry point of the author. Issues of spirituality and parallel women-church groups provide one vantage point for Christian feminists seeking change (Winter, Lummis, Stokes, 1994). Issues of power and authority provide another (Russell, 1987; The Mudflower Collective, 1985; Chopp, 1995; Lebans, 1994).

Several works deal specifically with feminist visions of ministry and theological education for ministry (Lebans, 1994; Chopp, 1995; Rhodes, 1987). Often stressed is the need to embody feminist principles of mutuality, inclusivity, solidarity and transformative action through the structures, content and style of our ministry, whether it be in a congregation, social ministry setting or theological school. Most authors in this area promote the use of feminist praxis, the spiralling dialogical relationship between theory and practice, as a method of change for justice in the church.

Diaconal ministry counts prophetic ministry as central to its task, relies on a strong critique of oppressive social structures, including the church, and provides a lived alternative vision of ministry through its empowering style and commitment to transformation for justice. The "history of diaconal ministry is a history of struggling for justice against a wall of institutionalized sexism."² Heuer and Jones though, (Lebans, 1994) claim diaconal ministry to be an already existing feminist model of ministry in both its vision and style.

Just as diaconal ministers have struggled to challenge structures, beliefs and patterns of ministry in their work, so too has the Women In Ministry Committee. Literature that documents some of the work of the Women In Ministry Committee include a 1989

2 Kay Heuer and Teresa Jones, "Diaconal Ministry as a Feminist Model of Ministry" in *Gathered By The River: Reflections and Essays of Women Doing Ministry*, ed. Trudy Lebans (Dundas, ON and Toronto: artemis enterprises and The United Church Publishing House, 1994), 126.

"Evaluation of the Women In Ministry Committee", the 1983 "Women In Ministry Research Report", and the 1994 report "Women's Voices: Stories shared by women in ministry within the United Church of Canada". Other documents such as WIMOG and WIM committee minutes as well as the minutes of the DMPE annual and executive meetings, between the years of 1980 to 1984, were helpful in charting the history of the WIM staff position.³ These reports and records show the breadth of work for change by women as the reality of women working within a patriarchal institution was addressed. As a teller of truth, a vocal voice against sexism and injustice, and a locus of change in the church, the Women In Ministry Committee has played a central prophetic role.

FEMINIST THEORY

Feminist theory places varying emphases on the role of theory, experience, practice and women in understanding the effectiveness of strategies for change. Different currents of feminism (liberal, socialist, radical) based on differing analyses of the root of injustice, as well as women's diverse identities, growing out of varying socio-economic and cultural contexts, has led to disparate understandings and practices among feminists.

Those defining feminism as an approach to life that challenges the right of any group to control others on the basis of sex, race, class, sexual orientation, religion or nationality,⁴ (Bunch, 1987; hooks, 1984) build their theory from action and reflection in community. The challenge, according to these writers, is to work on transforming existing social structures, as well as creating alternative structures. They believe feminists must critique issues of

³ In researching this material, I discovered that the minutes of the Oct.5-6, 1981 WIMOG meeting were missing from the United Church Archives.

⁴ Charlotte Bunch, Passionate Politics: Feminist Theory in Action (New York: St.Martin's Press, 1987), 147.

organizational structure, power, leadership and money as they affect the growth and strategy of the women's movement. For Bunch, the power of "the personal is political" and the concept of "sisterhood" have been essential to raising women's consciousness and strength in this movement. hooks challenges the "bourgeois" women's vision of "sisterhood" and bases her definition of feminism not on women's shared experiences but on their common resistance to all the different forms of male domination. Some feminists go even further in their analysis, citing patriarchy and the accumulation of wealth on a world scale with the resultant colonization of production and thinking, as the root cause of all other systems of domination (Mies, 1986).

I would place myself along this continuum as a feminist who thinks the interconnections of unjust ideologies spring from patriarchal capitalism. I view structural and systemic change as critical to the transformation of the church, the world and individuals. It is not enough for women to be accorded "rights" within a patriarchal system. The system itself needs to be revisioned and structurally transformed.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The body of literature pertaining to research methodology and change theory varies in its purpose, and its approaches to design, data collection, data analysis and application. Qualitative methodology, as a particular type of inquiry into change, is likewise varied.

More empirical qualitative research theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), suggests that the value or "goodness" of research methods derives from an almost clinical, detached treatment of the "ground", such as change, being studied. Feminist qualitative research theory (Kirby and McKenna, 1989; Isasi-Diaz, 1993) claims that a much closer dialogical relationship is necessary between all those involved in the research process. Rather than emphasizing "good science" as the objective, the purpose of feminist qualitative research is

liberative praxis ie. political change for social justice. The epistemological privilege of the poor and oppressed, of women, is emphasized examining social realities.(Millman and Kanter,1987). Communities of resistance, can become central to the examination of ideological issues of power, sex, domination and change (Harding, 1987; Welch, 1989). In this context, the process of doing research and creating theory can itself be empowering for those involved.

According to other authors, who have examined differing feminist practices of organizing for social change, current strategies of either mainstreaming or disengagement need to be bridged in order to create a healthy tension between nurturing new vision and changing existing structures and systems (Adamson, Briskin, McPhail, 1988; Wine and Ristock, 1991). These authors challenge the effectiveness of the rallying cries of "sisterhood" and the concept of "the personal is political" in building mass movements for social change. They also challenge the liberal ideology of change presently understood in Canadian society.

In the struggle to create liberative feminist praxis, theory and practice need to be united (hooks, 1984; Bunch, 1987). Theory then becomes a tool for passing on what we have learned about our goals and analysis.

As a woman in ministry who struggles to work and live using a liberative praxis, I have chosen a feminist theological perspective for my research methodology. Essential elements of this methodology include appreciating the diversity of women's voices, the dialogical relationship between researcher and subject, the value of critiquing the status quo from the point of view of the marginalized, the strength and power of communities of resistance in bringing about change for social justice, and the influence of engagement.

CHAPTER 3.

METHODOLOGY

To begin this study, a focus group of four women, presently engaged in diaconal ministry, met for an evening of shared reflection. The purpose of the group discussion was to begin to generate question areas about change. The group discussed "good news" stories, stories of difficulties and stories still unfolding, as they related to congregational transformation for justice. We also discussed what keeps women in ministry hopeful and working for change in the church. Comments were noted and recorded on audio tape.

After analyzing the focus group discussion, reviewing my previous research on women in ministry and current literature in the field, several potential research question areas were identified. One of these research areas concerned the climate in which structural and systemic change is possible. Questions in this area related to institutional and contextual factors, timing, socio-economic and political conditions, and the nature of public consciousness. Identifying the blocks and opposition to change, both within and outside the Women In Ministry Committee, were important areas for research. Issues of power, traditional understandings of ministry, sex role stereotyping, the value of women's work, and the politics of the courts and General Council divisions, were pertinent to this research area. Likewise, investigating support and affirmation in the change process was also helpful. Questions here related to identifying from where support came and how it was offered.

Another potential research area was the use of feminist principles in the change process. Employment of a diaconal perspective and the practices of inclusion, praxis and integration were investigated. The relationship between the personal and the political was examined.

When the specific research questions were formulated, they were tested with

the thesis advisor to ensure that there was validity in the direction and intent of the questioning. Changes were made.

The next phase of the research process was to gather experiential data from members of the Women In Ministry Overview Group, the Women in Ministry Committee (1984-1989), and Ann Naylor, the first staff person. I initially mailed a copy of my thesis proposal to each participant. After receiving feedback, from the first interview participant, regarding the vagueness of her memory in relation to the years under study, I also sent a copy of the interview questions, and a set of WIMOG and DMPE meeting minutes to the remaining participants. I held individual interviews to investigate the change process as it related to the development and implementation of the Women In Ministry staff position within the Division Of Ministry Personnel and Education of the United Church of Canada. I had also hoped to organize a group interview, but the timing limitations and the geographic locations of participants made this impossible. This would have been a good strategy for enhancing collective memory of the events of the period under study.

Through the use of tapes and written notes, information was collected and recorded. After each interview, I also recorded my reflections on the content of the interview and the process itself. There were some technical problems experienced due to my lack of adequate familiarity with the taping equipment. This meant that one interview had to be partially repeated on a second visit. All information has been kept confidential and used without direct named reference in this thesis.

Once the formal interviewing stage of the data collection process was completed and broad data categories were clarified, the content of the interviews were analyzed for :

1. a general narrative account of the development and implementation of the Women In Ministry staff position within the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education of the United Church of Canada; and
2. significant factors that influenced the development and implementation of the

abovementioned staff position, as suggested by question areas, such as institutional and societal conditions, approaches to leadership and change, and personal involvement.

Once the descriptive analysis was constructed from the data, one participant reviewed it for accuracy and gave me feedback.

Data in this study has been discussed in terms of change theory and implications for congregational diaconal ministries of change toward justice within the church. Questions for further study have been included. A reflection on the application of my research process for diaconal ministry toward change for justice has also been offered. This thesis will be made available to persons and groups who can benefit from the content, such as diaconal ministers working in education, pastoral care, and community service for change towards justice.

VALIDATIONS

Both the content of the interviews and the research method were analyzed as interviews proceeded. The trustworthiness of my notetaking procedures was tested and validated by the thesis advisor by comparing notes I had taken, with taped interviews. She found them accurate. Although initially identified research areas served as files or categories for data analysis, the research areas, questions and interview process required adjustment to more effectively explore the research issue. Adjustments in research areas, questions, and/or interview protocol were discussed first with the thesis advisor. One adjustment related to data gathering and analysis was the recognition that efforts to implement the WIM staff position were not seen by participants as discrete from advocacy and support work in other areas of WIMOG and WIM work. The position, rather, was a symbol or a confluence of hopes, dreams and plans on different levels. The interviews then ranged broadly around the full work of these groups even when direction back to the staff position was requested. This seems to indicate the wholeness of feminist process, where an end is another piece in an ongoing and

complex strategy for change. It also seems to testify to the shared leadership model that was used in both these groups.

The thesis reflects the voices of the interview participants, as well as those represented in the literature.

CHAPTER 4.

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

*They seem to become natives of that element,
the black sleek heads of seals
bouncing like half-submerged balls.¹*

The development of the Women in Ministry Staff Position begins with three strands of history: one involves the position of Co-Deputy Secretary for the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education (DMPE); another relates to the Interdivisional Taskforce on the Changing Roles of Women and Men in Church and Society, later the Committee on Sexism; and the last strand comes from the Women in Ministry Overview Group (WIMOG).

CO-DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DMPE

When the Women in Ministry staff position was proposed, Glenys Huws was working half-time as the Co-Deputy Secretary in the DMPE of the United Church of Canada. Part of her job was to "open up the theological system for groups who hadn't been part of it" ² Those groups included aboriginal people, lay pastoral ministers, diaconal ministers, and women in ministry. So, one quarter of an already part-time position was devoted to advocacy work for women in ministry.

¹ Marge Piercey, "To Be Of Use" in Cries of the Spirit: A Celebration of Women's Spirituality ed. Marilyn Sewell, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 172,173.

² Participant's comment.

INTER-DIVISIONAL TASKFORCE ON THE CHANGING ROLES OF WOMEN AND MEN IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Another strand of history relating to the development of the WIM staff position was the Inter-Divisional Taskforce on the Changing Roles of Women and Men in Church and Society, named the Committee on Sexism from 1984 on. This Taskforce was created in response to the 1977 General Council mandate, which included concerns for women. There was also growing recognition that structural support for women within the institutional church was needed. The Division of Mission in Canada proposed, to the twenty-eighth General Council, the creation of an inter-divisional taskforce, with staff for a special two year period to focus on issues for women in the church.³ The Taskforce began its work in 1980. Part of WIMOG's mandate was to liaise with this taskforce, "responding to and initiating concerns related specifically to women in ministry." Glenys Huws, staff to WIMOG, was a member of this taskforce, as was Mary Conner (Thompson Boyd), DMC staff, who also acted as a member of WIMOG.

WOMEN IN MINISTRY OVERVIEW GROUP

In 1981, during Glenys' tenure as Co-Deputy Secretary for DMPE, the Women in Ministry Overview Group was established. In the USA, structural support was already in place through the Professional Church Leadership Program of the National Council of Churches, specifically, the Commission on Women in Ministry Program or COWIM. In Canada, Shelley Finson had been involved with COWIM as a result of her work with the ecumenical Movement For Christian Feminism. Then, in the mid-seventies, the UCC took

³ DMPE Annual Meeting minutes, Apr. 16-18, 1980.

official membership sending delegates from DMPE.

At the same time, Conference consultations, convened by Mary Sanderson, DMPE administrative support staff, were being held across the country with women in the order of ministry. These were held up to the year 1980 and dealt with concerns regarding, "loneliness and isolation, struggles with feminist theology and the need for continuing education events."⁴

At the Oct. 1980 meeting of COWIM, the UCC representatives attending decided to design "a structure through which concerns and ideas about Women in Ministry generated at COWIM could be supported and developed in the UCC. Thus, the Women in Ministry Overview Group, a two year experimental project, using funds previously earmarked for participation in COWIM, was born."⁵

The mandate of WIMOG was as follows:

a) supporting and advocating increased sensitivity in the MPE network (personnel staff in conferences, education and student committees, and settlement committees and standing committees, etc.) to issues/concerns related to women in ministry (N.B., especially the report on gatherings of women in ministry organized by Mary Sanderson 1979/80).

b) reviewing and monitoring the policies and decisions of the Division of MPE and its network to ascertain how these policies and decisions affect women in lay, commissioned and ordained professional ministries.

c) advocating within the Division of MPE and its network the concerns and issues facing women in ministry.

d) to liaise with the Inter-divisional Task Force on the Changing Role of Women and Men in the Church and Society, responding to and initiating concerns related specifically to women in ministry.

⁴ DMPE Annual Meeting minutes, Apr. 16-18, 1980.

⁵ WIM Committee minutes, June 20-21, 1984.

e) monitoring the effect of systems and structures of the church as a whole on women in ministry across the country.

f) drawing the attention of the Division of MPE and its network to available resources which address issues facing women in ministry.

g) supporting and encouraging communication among women in ministry through Women's Concerns Newsletter and any other appropriate publications.

h) gathering the experience of other denominations in matters related to women in ministry.⁶

It was at the first WIMOG meeting of May 19-20, 1981 that the issue of staff workload, and the style and functioning of staff in relation to WIMOG, was discussed and one member was asked to investigate COWIM learnings in this area. Unfortunately, minutes of the Oct. 5-6, 1981 WIMOG meeting "had gone astray" by the next meeting,⁷ and therefore, there is no record of any report on this matter.

Staff time was tracked by the group and, very early on, it was clear, "that there was more work than this structure was providing in staff time."⁸ The Overview Group, at its May 3-4, 1982 meeting, noted that, "It was recognized by the group that the dimensions of WIMOG work were far exceeding the time available for part of a part-time portfolio. One model suggested for providing more staff support to WIMOG is the freelance, i.e. to hire on a contract basis staff to do special projects such as staff support for the symposium on feminine theology."⁹ This was also confirmed by the findings of a research project undertaken by the Overview Group in Oct. 1981¹⁰ and published in 1984, which sought to gain "concrete,

⁶ "A Proposal to the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education", Oct. 24, 1980.

⁷ WIMOG minutes, May 3-4, 1982.

⁸ Participant's comment.

⁹ WIMOG minutes, May 3-4, 1982.

¹⁰ "Women in Ministry Overview Group Report" in the DMPE Executive minutes, Appendix "1", Oct. 8-9, 1981.

specific information about women's experiences in ministry."¹¹ The report showed many areas where women needed support in ministry. "The issues that were identified in that research project were issues that significantly affected women's experience in ministry and the ability to function effectively in ministry because of the obstacles that were put in front of them - things such as sexual harassment."¹²

"The major recommendation of WIMOG upon completion of its two year life span, was that there be a standing committee of the MPE Division established to focus on Women in Ministry and that a new staff position be created to be a resource to the Women in Ministry Committee."¹³

Glenys Huws' personal involvement and then, staff role with the Diaconal Ministry planning group, in the late 1970's and early 1980's, added "grist for the mill"¹⁴ in relation to consciousness raising around issues of women in ministry and the need for structural advocacy.

WIMOG itself articulated its reasons for proposing a standing committee and a new staff position within the DMPE. In Glenys Huws' report of the WIMOG to the Feb 8-9, 1983 DMPE Executive meeting, it is recommended, "That a half-time staff position be created to resource the women in ministry committee and to work within the MPE system to fulfil the mandate of the committee. It does not appear likely that a significant shift can be made in the present staff portfolios to accommodate this responsibility, it is recommended that a new staff position be created."¹⁵ WIMOG also stated that within the DMPE "the necessary staff arrangements ... should be in place in order for a committee that is charged with advocacy to

¹¹ DMPE, WIM Research Report, Preface, 1984, i.

¹² Participant's comment.

¹³ WIM Committee minutes, June 20-21, 1984, 5.

¹⁴ Participant's comment.

¹⁵ DMPE Executive minutes, "WIMOG Evaluation Report", Feb. 1983, 9.

effectively carry out its mandate, a mandate which necessitates making a significant impact on the work of other committees of the Division.”¹⁶

Within the WIMOG Evaluation Report, other reasons for the position were expressed, such as the need for: significant educational work within the committee's own membership, as well as the church; follow-through from the WIMOG Research Report; and more intentional and sustained advocacy work already begun.¹⁷

There was also “the realization, in the mid-eighties, that the numbers of women in ministry had escalated exponentially. It was quite phenomenal, the increase, and with that increase came increased awareness of how current systems and structures, of the day, didn't serve women.”¹⁸ According to the “WIM Research Report 1984,” the number of women in ministry had doubled in five years. Especially significant was the dramatic increase in women entering theological schools in preparation for ordained ministry. “From 14% of the total number of ordinands in 1976, the percentage of women in theological colleges had risen to 40% in 1981.”¹⁹

The recommendation for the new half-time staff position was presented first to the Feb. 1983 DMPE Executive meeting and then to the April 1983 DMPE Annual Meeting. In the “Report of Women in Ministry Overview Group” to the DMPE Executive, Oct. 11-12, 1983 and in the WIMOG minutes of May 16-17, 1983, Glenys Huws reviewed the decisions and actions of the DMPE Annual Meeting in April 1983. She reported that the recommendation for the new position was received favourably and referred to the Staffing Committee. A request from the Diaconal Ministry Sub-committee for a half-time position was also approved.

¹⁶ DMPE Executive minutes, “WIMOG Evaluation Report”, Feb. 1983, 7.

¹⁷ DMPE Executive minutes, “WIMOG...Report”, 6.

¹⁸ Participant's comment.

¹⁹ Janet Silman, “Women in Ministry Research Report”, 5.

Later in the meeting, however, there was a decision by the Annual Meeting to "try to respond to the request for increased advocacy of one kind or another within the MPE system by not adding any new staff i.e. they decided to try to deal with the increased needs by dividing the Administrator's job into two half-time positions, one half of the position focusing on the administrative tasks and the other to be assigned to advocacy work."²⁰ In other words, the Administrator would be giving, at best, one quarter time to the work of Women in Ministry.

At a follow-up meeting of the Staffing Committee, it was decided that this division of the Administrator's job was "impractical". Staffing Committee members decided to request General Council Executive, that fall, to approve the addition of one half-time position to be focused on advocacy for Women in Ministry and Diaconal Ministry.

At the May 16-17, 1983 WIMOG meeting, the group reviewed the process and how WIMOG's request had become combined with the staff position for Diaconal Ministry. It was decided that even though the Annual Meeting had affirmed the request for a half-time WIM staff position in principle, it had then tried to meet these needs within the present staff structure, in response to the "cool climate" in relation to adding more staff. The Staffing Committee was seen to have improved the situation by recommending a new position, but that this position was only half-time in total for both WIM and Diaconal Ministry - one quarter time each. People were seen as also responding to the negative climate regarding adding staff.

WIMOG also felt some discomfort in creating a position where ordained women as a group would feel excluded from applying, since the job would also relate to the Diaconal Ministry Sub-committee.

Therefore, WIMOG decided to re-state to the Staffing Committee and the DMPE Executive, the recommendation that "there be one half-time position related to Women in

²⁰ "Glenys' Report" in the WIMOG minutes, May 16-17, 1983, 2.

Ministry and not combined with Diaconal Ministry."²¹ WIMOG didn't want to jeopardize the Diaconal Ministry position, so it was decided that the request would be based on "a) the work load involved b) the limitations on the selection process which would occur if the WIM and Diaconal Ministry positions were combined and c) the increased flexibility/ freedom and variety of talents available if there were two half-time staff people added to staff rather than just one..."²²

The Secretary of the Division was briefed to try to gain her support for this request when it would be presented to the Staffing Committee.

It was also decided that WIMOG should meet with the Diaconal Sub-Committee to "share our concern with them, find out where they stand on the matter of their request for a half-time person, and then pursue with some kind of joint strategy if possible."²³ After consultation with some members of the Diaconal Ministry Sub-committee, it was agreed to "strongly recommend through the Staffing Committee to the MPE Executive, that the MPE Division request permission from the General Council Executive in Nov. 1983 to create two new half-time positions, one for Women in Ministry and one for Diaconal Ministry."²⁴

The Staffing Committee agreed with this request and drafted a job description for the WIM position based on the mandate for the WIM Committee.

The recommendation was approved by General Council Executive in November 1983 and the WIM staff position was filled by Ann Naylor in August 1984.

The members of WIMOG from 1981-1983 were: Mary Connor (Thompson Boyd), Wendy Hunt, Glenys Huws (staff), Karen (Toole) Mitchell, Florence Morson and Linda Murray.

²¹ WIMOG minutes, May 16-17, 1983, 2.

²² WIMOG minutes, May 16-17, 1983, 3.

²³ WIMOG minutes, May 16-17, 1983, 3.

²⁴ Glenys Huws, "Report of WIMOG to DMPE Executive", Oct. 11-12, 1983.

The first membership of the WIM Committee starting in 1984 were: Pamela Brown, Charlotte Caron, Barbara Elliott, Kathryn Guthrie, Wendy Hunt, Elizabeth McCloy, Sharon Moon, Linda Murray, Ann Naylor, Norma Pushee, Sheila Slaney, and Kathy Toivenan.

THE STORY CONTINUED

The next three chapters, dealing with Context, Strategies, Accomplishments and Significance, explore more fully, the actions and decisions detailed in this descriptive analysis. By examining the social and institutional climate of the day, the strategies and accomplishments of WIMOG and the WIM committee, and the significance of this work for participants, the history of the United Church of Canada becomes truly "herstory". Women's work for justice is both revealed and celebrated.

CHAPTER 5.

CONTEXT FOR CHANGE

*I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
who do what has to be done, again and again.¹*

SOCIAL CONTEXT

The work to develop and implement the Women In Ministry staff position took place within the social and institutional context of the early 1980's. Factors such as timing, historical attitudes, social patterns, attitudes to change, political and socio-economic conditions were perceived by participants as both blocks to and supports for this work.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

From the emphasis in the 1960's on individual rights, women were starting to fight for the right to choose their own destiny. Talk of "women's rights" in the 1960's became transformed into a broader social analysis in the 1970's which focused on the "oppression of women". "In that 1980's decade, women's issues got serious attention politically, in a way that has disappeared in the 1990's...The National Action Committee used to meet with the leaders of all the political parties and they all showed up. It's hard to know which is the chicken and the egg. There was a synergy created in there."²

Books by secular feminists, like Gloria Steinem, were popular, and feminist analysis was converging with the growing awareness and naming of sexual harassment and abuse. In

¹ Marge Piercy, "To Be Of Use" in Cries of the Spirit.

² Participant's comments.

1981, legal changes in the new Canadian Constitution forced institutions that were federally or provincially accountable to make revisions in policies and procedures to accommodate women. That same year The Ontario Human Rights Code was amended to include protection against sexual harassment.³

Organized labour was strong and also doing considerable work on women's rights. There were women's organizations in many of the unions. Affirmative action programs were put in place for women in industry and the professions. Definitions of sexual harassment were being developed and included in various codes.⁴

Participants remembered that this was a time when other institutions and governments were looking at the issues of sexism and women's rights and formulating policies and procedures. At various universities and educational institutions, such as York University, the University of Toronto, and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), pilot work on sexual harassment policies was being done. By this time, too, Women Studies programs were available at many universities.

Issues, such as maternity leave, for women in many forms of leadership, were being examined by a variety of groups and funding was made available to support this work. There was a general feeling in society that provisions needed to be in place to address these issues because it was just and fair. "Politically correct" language was settling into people's consciousnesses and the term itself, without its later bitter sting of backlash, emerged as a sign of changing times.

Many women who had left the church were involved in the secular women's movement. A plethora of feminist organizing was evident in women's groups, activities, marches and rallies. "The feminist movement was tangible, both in the church, and sometimes

³ Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, Margaret McPhail, Feminist Organizing For Change: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3.

⁴ Participant's comment.

more clearly, outside the church.”⁵ Voices were heard, often and loud, advocating for women’s rights, for women to be taken seriously. These local action groups paralleled the groups emerging in the church. In fact, many of these women were surprized to find radical feminists still in the church.⁶

It was a time when the economy was perceived to be fairly strong, and the political situation was relatively stable. Students still protested and the National Action Committee on the Status of Women had influence. Participants recalled that it was easy to be connected with the energy of the women’s movement and this energy helped sustain the work of the Division of MPE in the church at the time. People were accustomed to hearing voices for change in other places - in the news, on the street, especially in urban centres. There was good energy and optimism in society, prime time for change. Structural, social and political support and resources for the work of the WIMOG, in the broader social context, were evident. “It was a very active time for local and national action committees... so there was a kind of parallel process going on in the secular and church communities.”⁷

SOCIAL BLOCKS

However, the very reason for the existence of resistance movements and activism during this period, was the continued power of patriarchal attitudes, structures and systems manifested in violence, abuse and harassment against women, unfair hiring and salary policies, sexism and misogyny in language and thinking patterns. As one woman pointed out, “Patriarchy has to do with not taking women seriously.”⁸

Beyond men’s resistance to sharing power, participants also perceived many women’s reluctance to support change for justice in society at this time. This was seen as related to

⁵ Participant’s comment.

⁶ Participant’s comment.

⁷ Participant’s comment.

⁸ Participant’s comment.

women's internalized oppression and low self-esteem, socialization patterns, need for security, and lack of feminist consciousness or analysis of their experience.

It was thought that some women were still in "cocoons" and not conscious of the women's movement, or that others would have preferred to carry on with the status quo without critique or resistance. For many, in significant relationships with men who were resistant to change, there was defensiveness and denial. Fearing alienation from men as lovers, husbands, providers, and colleagues, these, "women were more than happy to take advantage of the gains that had been made possible by the voices that challenged patriarchy, without wanting to identify with those voices."⁹

Women who were not supportive of change for justice, it was thought, were often those who, through the effects of women's socialization, had learned to deny the injustices they suffered. "I think, for a lot of women, sexual harassment is like background noise and we expect it. We don't even notice what it's like. We say, 'Men will be men,' 'He's harmless,' 'It doesn't mean anything.'"¹⁰ Some women denied having any personal issues with men. Abuse, harassment, trivialization were perceived as "background noise",¹¹ barely audible and to be expected. Thus, women were not always supportive to one another. It was in their best interests as marginalized people to claim connection with the patriarchal mainstream, rather than with a feminist fringe.

Despite this intransigence among both women and men in the early 1980's, it was felt that, overall, there was a growing level of consciousness and support in society for justice for women. This was evident in the many structural and systemic initiatives that were undertaken in government, industry, education and the professions. And so, WIMOG and parts of the church, working within this social context, were moving on parallel tracks.

⁹ Participant's comment.

¹⁰ Participant's comment.

¹¹ Participant's comment.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Within the institutional church, there were also elements that facilitated and elements that blocked the work of WIMOG toward the implementation of the WIM staff position. Participants noted factors such as key people on staff at the national office, parallel work being done by other work groups and organizations, the network of women in ministry, and the climate of the church at that time, as supportive and affirming of their work. Equally clear were the institutional blocks that threatened to frustrate or derail the implementation process. Obstructions included a lack of critical consciousness, the complexity of bureaucratic process, the silencing of women's stories, and blatant personal hostility towards those advocating a Women in Ministry staff position.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Participants remembered that, in the early 1980's, there was a great increase in the number of women coming into ministry and a growing awareness that the current structures and systems of the church did not serve women. Many women in ministry were talking about problems of isolation, and settlement, child care expenses and loss of jobs because of pregnancy. It was becoming clear within the Division of MPE that even though the United Church of Canada had been ordaining women for almost fifty years, there were still some obstacles to their full participation. It was felt that the church was ready for the work of WIMOG to come forward and early reports were warmly received by DMPE. There was a feeling that this "nice, white, liberal, middle class church of course wants to be responsive to these dear women, my god."¹² This was also a time when there was great consciousness about needing women's voices on committees and increasing the number of women within the court

¹² Participant's comment.

structures.

The General Council Offices, at 85 St. Clair, were seen to be in a mode of creation, so that if a need was identified, financial resources could be found. "The bureaucracy wasn't always a block. Sometimes it actually assisted or enabled us to get it done."¹³ A coincidence of factors promoted WIMOG moving from the status of a fringe group to a standing committee in 1984 with more accountability and financial support. And at this point, the WIM staff position seemed to many as a natural consequence of this bureaucratic process.

Participants saw that, parallel to the work within the General Council Offices, was the development of Feminist Theology in the broader church. This had a significant impact on how the work of WIMOG and WIM was received. Feminism itself seemed to have generated tremendous energy and enthusiasm for change. "Basic for some feminists...was that the patriarchal structure of the church had to change and that the church being what it was, would change."¹⁴ All that was happening in the secular world was mirrored in the church, so that issues of language, day care, maternity and paternity leave, housing, sexual harassment were being seen as issues in the church and for the church. For some participants, the church was seen as in the forefront of change for justice.

An important supportive element of church context at this time was the precedence of groups which acted as a catalyst for the creation of WIMOG itself. Participants noted that the Commission on Women in Ministry Program, COWIM, of the National Council of Churches of Christ USA (NCCCUSA), was already dealing with issues of racism and sexism in its own network in the 1970's. DMPE had sent delegates to COWIM meetings because, at that time, there weren't any other churches in Canada doing this work. Eventually, WIMOG, modelled on COWIM, was created in the UCC. Connections were maintained with COWIM as a sister group within the larger church context.

¹³ Participant's comment.

¹⁴ Participant's comment.

WIMOG members identified the Movement For Christian Feminism (MCF), as another important ecumenical advocacy group. Founded in Canada in the mid-1970's, and staffed in Toronto by Shelley Finson, the MCF raised women's justice issues and encouraged various denominations to take responsibility for change within church systems.

Other groups across the country, such as the Christian Feminist Network in Saskatchewan Conference and a women's group at the Vancouver School of Theology, had been working for over ten years on consciousness raising as part of women's support networks. There was keen optimism and hard work done by many women and a general feeling by women in ministry in the United Church that the WIM Committee and the staff position were needed. There was lots of excitement but "ordained women were beginning to understand in ways that they hadn't ... how hard this was going to be if you were a feminist. I think diaconal women, deaconesses, missionaries, have known for a hell of a long time how hard it was."¹⁵

Participants noted that the United Church, at the national level, had also worked hard on justice issues in the 1970's. Conferences were organized with many women volunteers. "I think that both energy for and openness to some of the changes the DMPE made and the advocacy the Division did, was provided by this larger ...critical mass in the grassroots of the church."¹⁶

In some of the theological schools, women's centres were being set up for women to do networking. And, at St Andrew's College, a woman had been hired intentionally as a faculty member to discern what difference that would make to the lives of students and faculty.

Conferences, such as Maritime Conference, were either already involved or became involved in the work on sexual harassment and abuse. The personnel ministers' network

¹⁵ Participant's comment.

¹⁶ Participant's comment.

supported the WIMOG and WIM mandate to chart policy and procedures. The network, in turn, provided information to these two committees on local contexts and applications.

Consciousness around diaconal ministers, who were primarily women, was also high at this time and with real impact from the Centre For Christian Studies being felt in the push to have diaconal representation on national committees.

Participants recalled tacit support from other General Council Divisions for the work of WIMOG and WIM, with some openness to education and collaboration. One very important group that helped maintain an affirmative climate for change for justice was the Taskforce on Changing Roles of Women and Men in Church and Society, under the Division of Mission in Canada. This Taskforce, which began in 1980, existed through the same time period as WIMOG and eventually became the General Council Committee on Sexism. The role of this group was, "to reflect the church to itself in terms of how it was manifesting patriarchy in its structures, call the church to account, hold it accountable, and help it change."¹⁷ One WIMOG member commented, "I saw that committee as the real courageous group in the church and we were the group that was more structurally based. We were, if anything, the safer group."¹⁸ The Taskforce, seemed to provide a prophetic voice for justice and a model of transformative action in the church that was echoed in the advocacy and education work of WIMOG and WIM.

It was thought that reports to the church on inclusive language, "Daughters and Sons of God", and sexuality, "In God's Image" and "Gift, Dilemma and Promise", added to the ferment of the time. "Women in ministry made sexuality visible. When women were pregnant you couldn't deny women's sexuality..."¹⁹ Things were changing and many people really welcomed the change.

¹⁷ Participant's comment.

¹⁸ Participant's comment.

¹⁹ Participant's comment.

Participants recalled the climate of the day as “polite”. “The church’s desire to appear to be doing the right thing was very clear. We needed to have every kind of colour, shape, hue, face covered as a liberal church and not a radical church... This was the day of strong voices... that had moved to significant positions in the church but I remember the others who didn’t agree being incredibly polite. There was no nastiness, there was no name calling, there was no kind of clear out and out, ‘knock ‘em drag ‘em down’ battles going on. We were all Christian. That was our umbrella.”²⁰

Mentioned numerous times by participants, were the “strong voices” in critical places within the DMPE and beyond who were empathetic, supportive and strongly committed to the work of WIMOG in developing and implementing the WIM staff position. DMPE staff in general were seen as wanting to be responsive. Howie Mills, General Secretary of DMPE in the early 1980’s was engaged by the work of WIMOG and helpful in plotting strategy. He had been one of the UCC representatives to the National Council of Churches group and it was partly his suggestion that the WIM staff position be created. Anne Squire, who succeeded Howie Mills, was the first female General Secretary and played a strong role in advocating for the WIM position and overcoming obstacles to it. There was “strong structural backup of people in positions of authority.”²¹ This support was experienced both on behalf of the work of WIM and WIMOG.

At this time, the job of Deputy Secretary for the DMPE was shared by Glenys Huws and Harry Oussoren, both “very strong people” with pro-feminist attitudes. Glenys’ half-time portfolio consisted of staffing groups that needed better access to theological education. This included women represented by WIMOG . Participants saw Glenys as key to this work for change because of her commitment and her ability to “keep (WIMOG) on track.” Through her tracking of time spent staffing WIMOG, it was clear that there was much more work to

²⁰ Participant’s comment.

²¹ Participant’s comment.

be done than she could give as part of a half-time position. When Glenys left the position in 1984, after the WIM staff person and the Diaconal Ministry staff person were hired, women were almost half the DMPE staff, which was unusual in the Divisions at that time.

"There were key people in staff positions and elected member positions that were basically on side.... I think on the whole the Division valued the work."²² Frank Meadows, as chair of the DMPE, was also cited as an empathetic presence as well as members of the Division Executive. These people were informed by women in the network, such as Barb Elliot in Saskatchewan, and could therefore bring that knowledge back to meetings in Toronto. Lorne Taylor-Walsh, Executive Secretary of the United Church of Canada, was also named as supportive of the work of WIMOG.

Another key person in the women's network was Shelley Finson, the staff to the MCF and later of the Atlantic School of Theology. "She had tenacity and persistence and intelligence, and she knew how to move in systems... Shelley was an absolutely critical and essential ally through that whole process."²³ Beyond her support to WIMOG itself, Shelley worked the networks. "She would pull together the political analysis with the theological analysis and she would go across the country doing this for women."²⁴

Mary Thompson Boyd who staffed the Taskforce on Changing Roles of Women and Men in Church and Society, as well as sat as a member of WIMOG, was experienced as an important contributor and link to the work of the Taskforce. Glenys Huws, a member at large on the Taskforce, brought direction and energy from that group to the work of WIMOG. This was seen as an especially useful cross fertilization for both groups which provided ferment and synergy in the work for change for justice.

Participants felt that there was, at this time, definitely a "confluence of people in the

²² Participant's comment.

²³ Participant's comment.

²⁴ Participant's comment.

know, who had the critical consciousness, who were willing and had energy, and people who were skilled to work within the system, the institutional system, at jobs that were part of the structure."²⁵

INSTITUTIONAL BLOCKS

Despite the many supports within the church structure for the development and implementation of the WIM staff position, there were also many obstacles. Participants named low expectations and lack of critical understanding among church members, an anti-bureaucratic and anti-Toronto bias, denial of oppression by some women, efforts to stall implementation, and blatant hostility, as the major blocks.

There was a sense that the church really didn't want to held accountable for the difficulties women in ministry were facing. People did not see advocacy as important:

"For some people, the notion of a WIM committee and the Committee on Diaconal Ministry...and any position that is there because of the belief of a need for advocacy was seen by some people as anathema to Christianity and so they could not understand themselves to be over and against feminism or justice. They would (believe)... that this is not required because we are all Christians and we can work it out. So they would see it as a theological displacement as opposed to an ideological conflict, because they wouldn't see these two things together."²⁶

Patriarchy was still strong within the structures which counted men in most leadership positions. "When we started doing an analysis of who was in designated leadership positions, it was overwhelmingly male, the chairs of Presbyteries, Conference Executive Secretaries, Presidents of Conference, so both staff and elected positions ... were overwhelmingly filled by men. And so I think this is a built in obstacle to having issues raised by women taken

²⁵ Participant's comment.

²⁶ Participant's comment.

seriously.”²⁷ Many men weren’t ready to take WIMOG work seriously. “Men in those positions of leadership... didn’t think of themselves as being patriarchal. They would deny it left, right and centre that they were sexist, that they would ever consider discriminating against a woman. They were genuinely nice men. And lots of women that supported them were genuinely nice women. But they hadn’t learned to see through a lens of critique of patriarchy.”²⁸

Tokenism was named as part of the attitude of the church to the work of bringing changes for justice for women. Delegates to COWIM were sent off with little expectation of accountability and no report to write. There was a sense that volunteers could do the work that WIMOG was doing and if it, “was really important work for the church ... then, there needed to be some men organizing that.”²⁹ The attitude remembered by some of the participants at General Council Executive meetings to shape the women’s staff job was, “...a kind of nodding, ‘There, there now, we’ll give you a half-time person and you’ll go away and you’ll all be happy when you have a person in place.’”³⁰ People in the structure could see the value of individual pieces of WIMOG’s work but couldn’t always see the big picture. As time went on and policy work developed, there were reactions of impatience, “So, isn’t that enough?”. As the number of women in the ordained stream grew to 25% of the ministry pool and more women entered theological schools, participants heard the song of, “Maybe the best way to do advocacy for women in ministry is to go out and recruit more men because women are taking over.”³¹

At the congregational level in the early 1980’s, many people still had not had the experience of women preachers. “So people didn’t think they were discriminating by not

²⁷ Participant’s comment.

²⁸ Participant’s comment.

²⁹ Participant’s comment.

³⁰ Participant’s comment.

³¹ Participant’s comment.

being open to call a woman. 'We're not ready for that yet. That's not who we are. It may be fine for big cities but we're not ready for that yet.'"³²

For congregations that already employed women in ministry as Staff Associates and Diaconal ministers, resistance to fair salaries took the form of anti-bureaucracy. "If you're going to make these standards you're going to hamstring us and lots of good things aren't going to happen. Don't tell us what to do."³³ Participants felt that women's work was not valued.

Another major obstacle to the development and implementation of the WIM staff position was the distance between the thinking and attitudes of the national and the regional church. The Toronto National Office was perceived by many as, "running way down the road with these policy changes, personnel issues and structural changes, and on the regional level, everyone was left shaking their head saying, 'Not us!'"³⁴ Along with that was the general mistrust of Toronto staff who were seen as "feathering their nests".

Just as in the wider social context, participants remembered that some women were happy to accept change that benefited them, but were unwilling to risk being associated with the work for change. Some were perceived as afraid to take this risk. "One of the risks of being associated with those strident women was that it would blatantly reduce your chances of being married and having a family, and that was a pretty high cost... Men in ministry were getting married but women weren't."³⁵ Naming oneself as a feminist was also seen as an invitation to exclusion from the community of women in a home Conference and from one's congregation. Women felt they had to survive in ministry and taking on the backlash was just too much.

Denial was seen as another reason for women's lack of support and resistance to

³² Participant's comment.

³³ Participant's comment.

³⁴ Participant's comment.

³⁵ Participant's comment.

analysis and change. Socialization to deny problems and patriarchy remained strong, and so the work of WIMOG and WIM, 'set up unnecessary divisions between women and men.'

Blocks in the court system of the church were perceived to be more subtle, less obvious. The decision was made to hire a WIM staff person half-time but the implementation of that decision proceeded more slowly, with less enthusiasm, and with resistance. The idea of having two part-time portfolios in one position, may have been an effort to keep the number of women staff down or to control finances. It wasn't outright opposition, but it was seen as stalling or dampening.

Another tactic that was used to block change for justice was pitting one advocacy group against another. The idea that, "If we give you money, we'll have to take it away from natives." was commonly expressed. One participant felt that marginalized groups such as diaconal ministers, lay pastoral ministers, lay people, native ministry and women in ministry were lumped together in Glenys Huws' portfolio. This arrangement had the appearance of seeming to attend to those groups but with minimum resources and little voice.

The necessity of many levels of bureaucratic approval meant politics had to be learned by WIMOG members and the process was slow. One participant saw these levels of approval as "window dressing" which she interpreted as stalling tactics. Others saw this related to keeping staff numbers the same, and the beginning of concern related to the proliferation of staff. It was difficult, also, to work interdivisionally because of the WIMOG mandate to work with women in ministry only. Even though the Division of Mission in Canada was doing similar work on women's issues, the structure did not seem flexible and responsive enough between Divisions, except for the Taskforce on Changing Roles, to benefit from each other's work.

When the WIM staff position and the Diaconal ministry position were finally approved, "it was built in that there would be an evaluation after five years to determine the future of the position which put those positions on a different footing than any other position

in the division ...all others were assumed to be permanent... So there was always the spectre of 'Do we need this committee anymore?'"³⁶ As well, the initial categorization of those two positions as one category lower than other program executive staff, seemed to signify a lower status to this work.

Participants remembered people in the church really fearing changes on behalf of women in ministry, not out of active discrimination, but out of the belief that "it was not God's intention that women would be doing certain things..."³⁷ Many people saw the challenge to patriarchy as a scandal, as witnessed by the "kicking and screaming" the church had done on the issues of inclusive language, and sexual orientation and ministry. Even liberal thinkers "who had their hearts in the right place ... when it came to the dollars and cents...didn't want some of the transformation. Once (the WIMOG and WIM work) led to structural or systemic change, it wasn't wanted."³⁸ "The more we wanted the harder it got... the work around sexual harassment policy was very hard work."³⁹ One participant described this as the church realizing it had created a monster it couldn't control.

A climate of hostile politeness was also detected by participants. "You were not allowed to share too many personal stories because that would be too destructive."⁴⁰ Other kinds of silencing and control were used in meetings under the guise of being "nice" and "Christian":

And the politeness seemed to reside mostly with those in power who would say there is no need to be nasty...This can be done, but it has to go slowly. So you couldn't get rude, because if you did...then marginalization would occur very quickly. Rudeness would be trying to say that something was sexist, but that word couldn't be used.⁴¹

³⁶ Participant's comment.

³⁷ Participant's comment.

³⁸ Participant's comment.

³⁹ Participant's comment.

⁴⁰ Participant's comment.

⁴¹ Participant's comment.

Despite overt “politeness”, one participant remembered the WIM staff person being “attacked” in the hall for what she had said and suggested in a General Council Executive meeting. Participants were told they had no right to raise issues of sexual harassment, “because it put men, particularly ordained men, in a very difficult position,” that made them feel vulnerable when their congregations wondered if they might be perpetrators.⁴² Another participant interpreted the decisions made in meetings as “cutting the legs off people...withdrawing their budgets and doing it in a politically correct fashion and being incredibly polite.”⁴³ This was not an environment for the weak of heart.

Socially and institutionally, the climate and times were a bubbling ferment of optimism and mistrust, hope and hostility. Despite the grip of patriarchy on social and church attitudes, structures and systems, it seemed that strong voices for change for justice were being heard through the din.

⁴² Participant’s comment.

⁴³ Participant’s comment.

CHAPTER 6.

STRATEGIES

*I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along,
who stand in the line and haul in their places,
who are not parlor generals and field deserters
but move in a common rhythm
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.¹*

Given the social and institutional climate that WIMOG was working in, it was clear that the group needed to work intentionally to navigate the maze of bureaucratic hoops within the institutional system, as well as find ways to validate and nurture its own vision of change for justice. Several strategies were named by participants, as critical to the work and life of both WIMOG and WIM in enabling the process of developing and implementing the WIM staff position and other work of change for justice. Strategies included: accountability; creativity; community; persistence; vigilance; bridgemaking; key people; advocacy; education; diversity; and documentation.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Essential to the work of WIMOG and WIM was clarity about and support for their mandate. Acting as a grounding place or reference point, the mandate was named as a way to legitimize the advocacy and support work of the two groups. "If you can get support for your mandate, as innocuous as it may sound, then you can keep on coming back to the principle of, 'We are doing what we were asked to do. We are being accountable.'"² Members of the WIM

¹ Marge Piercsey, "To Be Of Use" in Cries of the Spirit.

² Participant's comment.

committee worked hard to ground all their work in that mandate and to be careful with every step they took. "So whether or not people were inclined to value the work, they had to accept that we were doing our job."³

Accountability was also called forth from the church. A conscious strategy was used to remind people of their theological convictions, "what we as a community of faith are being called to do." And with this accountability was the necessity of presence, visibility and speaking out at meetings to hold up the commitment both that WIM and the church had made. In this way, participants saw that it was possible to use policies, tradition and theology as resources instead of weapons.

Another form of accountability was to the women in ministry constituency. There was an understanding that the Divisions of the church needed to share responsibility for the most marginalized, the people most affected by the decisions, by offering them input into those decisions. After policies and procedures were successfully implemented, one participant stressed the need, "to go back and remind folks how this work actually got done, who actually contributed to it, on whose backs this work was done; to remind people that it's not over."⁴ It was both faithful and wise to do so.

CREATIVITY

Reflecting on strategies used by WIMOG, one participant said, "You were as creative as you could be and you didn't let the church stop you!"⁵ When budget constraints dictated moving from three to two meetings a year, the WIM committee objected on the grounds of not being able to get enough work done. Then they became creative. They reworked their budget, billeted their members, doubled up on travel tickets, shared baking and cooking,

³ Participant's comment.

⁴ Participant's comment.

⁵ Participant's comment.

“They’d bring cookie tins full of stuff with them on the airline from across the country to these meetings.”⁶

Another creative strategy was used in the proposal to form the WIM committee. “We wanted to recognize that the primary work of the committee would be change for social justice and advocacy, and so, the implication that we wanted to put forward was that when this work was finished, you can disband us and send us all back to do something else.”⁷ The committee was set up with a five year mandate, but WIMOG members among themselves, “knew that justice for women would not come until the kingdom come, but politically speaking it would not be wise for us to say, ‘Let’s make this a committee that goes on forever.’”⁸

COMMUNITY

Participants noted the ethic of community that was lived out in the WIMOG and WIM groups. Attention to feminist principles and processes, such as acknowledging that the work belonged to the committee and staff, working together with advice and support, using consensus decision making and shared leadership were essential to the life of the groups as they worked within considerable constraints to challenge the church on justice issues. “We had task lists, we shared minute taking and these were in the days when there were no lap top computers...the chairing of meetings was shared which meant getting together with the staff person ahead of time so those people who were travelling came in early and the work was divided up and the agenda was planned.”⁹ One participant remarked that, “I have seldom been on a committee in the church that worked as systematically and democratically as the WIM

⁶ Participant’s comment.

⁷ Participant’s comment.

⁸ Participant’s comment.

⁹ Participant’s comment.

committee or WIMOG.”¹⁰

Participant’s repeatedly named the dedicated intentionality of members as they worked to be connected with each other in more than just their task orientation. The whole collective process, including the particular women on the two groups, the friendship and mutuality involved, and the care and support given, were valued highly by participants. “Certainly the women who were involved in those early years made the major difference and ...we liked each other, got along and we worked well together. But it was ... the combination of the particular personalities and the particular political bent that we all had, the strong commitment, the age that we were. We had a ton of energy and some wisdom ...”¹¹ Check-in was used to find out how people were doing in their back home work and this could take half the meeting time. “We would endorse, feed, stimulate, encourage each other ...”¹² Strategies for change evolved as women lived their struggles and shared them in community. And there was a conviction that, as much as possible within a hierarchical bureaucracy, it would be good to live out feminist principles, “we should be doing the work in the way that we want the world to become...”¹³ Because the work was so difficult and not always well received, it was essential that members care for one another. The community was, “an ongoing place of affirmation and support with lots and lots of laughter, lots of humour and sick jokes...lots of airplane stories.”¹⁴ Through their friendships it seemed that personal lives were nurtured and political change was facilitated, “... women have always utilized the power of friendship to do the most incredible piece of justice work through the centuries.”¹⁵

¹⁰ Participant’s comment.

¹¹ Participant’s comment.

¹² Participant’s comment.

¹³ Participant’s comment.

¹⁴ Participant’s comment.

¹⁵ Participant quoting Eleanor Stebner speaking about her book, The Women of Hull House, Winnipeg, November, 1997.

PERSISTENCE

Throughout these discussions, participant's emphasized the need for persistence when working to bring about change for justice. The question of how to work persistently in a non-adversarial way was one of the challenges constantly before the group.

A seemingly simple, yet ultimately powerful strategy was modelled early on by Glenys Huws. "This isn't good enough," became WIMOG's response to some of the church's decisions and actions. Glenys' strong commitment to the church led her to believe that "if you don't ask you won't know" and "there's no reason why they would say 'No' to us."¹⁶ When the April, 1983 Annual Meeting of the DMPE suggested that the Diaconal ministry committee staff position and the WIM staff position be combined, "we had to go back and say 'No, this isn't good enough, partly because of who it prohibits from applying, but also because you put two things together that don't necessarily fit.'"¹⁷ WIMOG heard the church responding to its request for a designated staff person with a "Yes, but," and remembered, "Sitting amongst ourselves saying, 'That's not good enough actually. That isn't good enough. And we are going back again and we are going to ask again for this position and it has to be half-time and it has to focus on this work.' And we did it and that is how we got this position."¹⁸ This was seen as part of knowing when and how to push back and challenge, to act as activists within the bureaucracy. There was a sense of living out a loyalty to the church without necessarily offering complete loyalty to the institution.

Participants saw that "you get feeling caught"¹⁹ because what you are pushing is carried by people you like and respect. So, persistence was perceived as adversarial but without animosity. "It was out of critique. It was out of faith. It was out of belief, out of

¹⁶ Participant's comment.

¹⁷ Participant's comment.

¹⁸ Participant's comment.

¹⁹ Participant's comment.

having been nurtured in this environment to believe that I am a child of God.”²⁰ Persistence, then, was located in an attitude that moved toward change without severing relationships along the way. “This is when I start to sound like a liberal, that adversarial is in fact, self-defeating, and that if I can find a way to participate in this process as if it were my right, which is, of course, what the WIMOG did, what I watched Glenys do, as well as trying to be accountable to the church structures in terms of financial obligations.”²¹ Another participant noted that, “The way you work for change has got to be a model of the goal you’re working towards.”²²

VIGILANCE

Vigilance was also needed to counter the fragility of change and the effects of stalling or dampening in the implementation of policies. “You need to be quite cognizant of the extent to which movement for justice can be blocked by one person, two people in particular positions. And so I think one of the lessons is not to take anything for granted and particularly in particular phases where work can be derailed, people can be demolished without most of the group ever having a clue that that’s what’s happening.”²³ Small changes to a Division’s or committee’s mandate were experienced as having devastating effects on the budget and purpose of work already in process.

BRIDGEMAKING

An important strategy for bringing about change for justice was the linking or bridgemaking WIMOG and WIM did with other committees within the national church doing similar or complementary work, with COWIM in the USA, and with their

²⁰ Participant’s comment.

²¹ Participant’s comment.

²² Participant’s comment.

²³ Participant’s comment.

constituency across Canada. Especially important, as already mentioned was the connection with the Taskforce on Changing Roles of Women and Men in Church and Society, later, the Committee on Sexism. This link, facilitated by Mary Thompson Boyd and Glenys Huws brought a broader perspective that included issues for women doing volunteer work in the church as well as women in paid professional ministry. The connections with the Committee on Diaconal Ministry, through Glenys as the shared staff person, were instrumental in 1984 in both committees co-operatively making a case for hiring two separate people for the two staff positions. Participants recalled using these bridges to "push everywhere. It pushed Candidature, Transfer and Settlement, Benefits. We pushed on language, on covenanting services.. and for emergency funding for women who found themselves suddenly unable to cope."²⁴ To make these links and formulate critique of such a vast expanse of the work of the church, WIMOG and WIM, took it upon themselves to monitor other committee's minutes. "Lots of things were raised out of that and lots of ways of awareness and strategizing developed."²⁵

Another intentional aspect of bridgemaking was connecting with "grassroots" support to provide grounding in the lives of women across the country. "We intentionally decided to be informed by the constituency in terms of how they identified their needs, the kind of support they wanted, and what kind of work they were trying to energize... We got a lot of guidance and direction from the women in ministry constituency which became, then, a base of support."²⁶

Ties with COWIM were also maintained and strengthened after Ann Naylor took the staff position, "...she made some pretty strong bonds with people around the continent ...She would get calls from people who wouldn't talk to anybody else but they knew they could talk

²⁴ Participant's comment.

²⁵ Participant's comment.

²⁶ Participant's comment.

to her because they knew, if they asked, she would keep it in confidence and she would find a way.”²⁷ Bridgework was also useful on sexual harassment and abuse issues where several conferences helped resource and develop the policy and procedure.

Bridging was particularly important in 1984 when the WIM committee was formed and Ann Naylor began as the staff person. Work on many issues, such as sexual harassment, carried on so it was important to have continuity. WIMOG, in proposing the WIM committee had already set out a mandate for that committee, which was worked on systematically in the following years. It was also decided that two members of WIMOG would act as continuing members on WIM.

KEY PEOPLE

Many participants stressed the need to have good working relationships and alliances with people in positions of authority and leadership. Using the voices of people who had access to different courts or groups, through their shared accountability to WIMOG and WIM's mandate, proved to be very strategic. The groups also learned that nominations to committees were critical. They attempted to get particular people on committees and if that wasn't possible, they asked, “who do we know that is on the committee that we could get to raise this issue. We found a myriad of ways to get that work addressed.”²⁸

ADVOCACY

One of WIMOG's major strategies was to use the WIM staff position as a focus, a place of power and privilege, to advocate for women in ministry to be taken seriously, without unnecessary compromise. One participant reported that, “the lobbying around that was what drew me to the WIMOG group, as well as saying, ‘I want a woman in place who is going to

²⁷ Participant's comment.

²⁸ Participant's comment.

speak for me.”²⁹ Another member noted that, “Somebody had to be there (in the institution), on the inside, who wouldn’t be...co-opted, which was one of the reasons we were so concerned about who would get hired.”³⁰ The role of advocate was taken very seriously, “I had a voice in places some women didn’t, so it was my job to carry them with me into those places...to go to Division meetings, to go to General Council executive and say, ‘We don’t make this stuff up. It is really important that we have good, fair policies here that provide safety; that we have resources that raise awareness, that call people into justice.’ ...I felt accountable to that community of women.”³¹

EDUCATION

A strategy that WIMOG and WIM used to nurture themselves and raise their own consciousnesses, was to build in an educational component into every meeting along with “an insistence on doing” theological reflection, “because it was really clear that we didn’t know everything and so we were committed to our own learning.”³² Theoretical analysis was named as a constant in meetings to support the work that was being done. Taking women seriously meant considering the needs and issues of women in ministry with children, who were pregnant, who were dealing with abuse or racism. “We did educationals on sexual harassment, on homophobia, on inclusive language, on racism... trying to see where it would go from there and what did that mean for our work and how do we work with these women and what do we do with these women who are calling?”³³ Spiralling from experience to reflection to theory and action was a necessary component of this work for change.

Education was also important in the DMPE and in member’s back home settings so

²⁹ Participant’s comment.

³⁰ Participant’s comment.

³¹ Participant’s comment.

³² Participant’s comment.

³³ Participant’s comment.

that more and more people could become involved in the process of working for change. Within congregations, Conferences, the Division, and at education centres, WIMOG and WIM members involved people in "Christian education with an edge" because "they were people who believed that change came by education, and the more we educated, the more we could facilitate change."³⁴ WIM used the celebration at General Council of the fiftieth anniversary of the ordination of women in the UCC, as a prime opportunity to educate the church about issues still outstanding for women. They made use of skits, which brought humour and energy to serious concerns.

DIVERSITY

As the work of WIMOG progressed, it became clearer to members that the membership itself needed to be more diverse in order to hear the many voices of women in ministry. WIMOG proposed that members on the WIM committee, while retaining a commitment to feminism, be more representative regarding such areas as geography, ideology, and student status.

DOCUMENTATION

A strategy that was considered essential by participants for the committee and its staff support was the necessity of writing clear proposals and keeping good documentation. "I think something you've got to bring to the system if you want to bring change, is knowing how to write proposals, how to write up documentation... That kind of bureaucratic skill is needed and I worked hard at it."³⁵ This was also named as important for retaining memory and accountability within the two groups themselves. WIMOG and WIM minutes would be reviewed in order to remind members of the work they had committed themselves to do.

³⁴ Participant's comment.

³⁵ Participant's comment.

For the development of the WIM position, "we were wise enough women to know that our personal experiences would be discounted, that we had to get statistical evidence, which lead to the survey we did."³⁶ Glenys had already been tracking the hours she spent working with WIMOG, and, in 1982-83, a research project was undertaken within the ministry constituency to broaden the rationale for the position. It was an important strategy to gain credibility for the implementation of the WIM staff position, but participants recalled that it also generated lots of response, feedback and excitement.

An active engagement with many parts of the institutional structure, with the regional courts of the church and local networks, helped WIMOG and WIM stay both grounded with the women in ministry constituency and aware of developments within the systems of the church as they evolved. The strategies of linking to many different groups, as well as the intentional nurturing and education within the committees themselves, helped to facilitate, in the 1980's, the successful implementation of the WIM staff position and many other pieces of justice work, such as the church's Maternity Leave Policy, the Sexual Harassment Policy and strategies to increase the church's advocacy and support of women in ministry who are disabled; who are lesbians; who are from minority racial and cultural groups.

For all this, WIMOG and its work, as noted by participants, was also influenced and constrained by both its perspective on change and its limited awareness of the diversity of women's voices in the church.

³⁶ Participant's comment.

CHAPTER 7.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND SIGNIFICANCE

*The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies. clean and evident.¹*

One of the major accomplishments of WIMOG was to enable the implementation of the half-time WIM staff position, and the creation of the WIM committee within the DMPE structure. Ann Naylor was hired as the first WIM staff person. The work that was done by WIMOG to bring that position about, and the work to live out the mandate of the newly formed WIM Committee in the mid and late 1980's, had tremendous significance both for the church, women in ministry, and for the members of WIMOG and WIM. Participants shared their reactions to the work accomplished, their sense of personal benefit and loss, and their wisdom about change and its application to other settings.

STRUCTURAL AND SYSTEMIC CHANGES

In the "Evaluation of the Women in Ministry Committee" presented to the DMPE January 9, 1989,² a sample of the projects that the WIM Committee engaged in or completed between 1984 and 1989, gives evidence of work that was carried on and developed from WIMOG, as well as the policy monitoring and development, education, advocacy, networking and support work WIM accomplished with the new staff person in place:

¹ Marge Piercey, "To Be Of Use" in Cries of the Spirit.

² The Evaluation Task Group, "Evaluation of The Women in Ministry Committee", (Winnipeg: Division of Ministry Personnel and Education, United Church of Canada, 1989).

1. Developing policies, guidelines and educational documents in the area of sexual harassment for use in the United Church.
2. Developing policy alternatives (for consideration by the church) in the area of maternity leave to address inconsistencies between conferences and congregations on the terms and conditions for maternity leave.
3. Gathering resources in the area of stress in ministry for general use, but specifically for women in ministry.
4. Advocating for women in ministry by monitoring the effects on women in ministry of the systems, structures and policies within the united Church and recommending necessary changes to ensure that women's experiences are taken into account. (i.e. a review of the candidature process, a critique of the transfer and settlement process, and recommendations regarding housing policy.)
5. Co-sponsoring pre-council gatherings for women commissioners to General Council to discuss policy proposals and to offer support to women commissioners.
6. Encouraging women to apply for faculty positions within theological schools; consulting with theological schools concerning curriculum changes to take into account women's experience and needs in ministry.
7. Receiving applications and selecting candidates for the Graduate Awards for Women in Ministry.
8. Encouraging regional opportunities for women to gather and sponsoring national gatherings. (i.e. a national women in ministry conference held at Bolton, Ontario in June 1987).
9. Facilitating communications among women in ministry. (i.e. the creation of a newsletter called the NoName Newsletter [so named in memory of her whose name was never noted, but whose ministry has sustained and energized the church at all times and in every place. Mark 14:99])

10. Created a regionally based 50th Anniversary Committee in Saskatchewan to prepare and distribute resources for the church's celebration of women's ministries on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the ordination of women in the United Church.
11. Compiling a bibliography of feminist theology resources.
12. Working with other church committees to bring to attention of the church issues and concerns affecting women in ministry, i.e. the ordination and commissioning service used at conference annual meetings; guidelines for interviews; continuing education.³

The report also indicates that other internal work of the committee included monitoring of division work and keeping other committees alerted and accountable relative to matters affecting women in ministry.⁴

One participant remarked that:

The difference in the system itself in terms of some of the Celebration of Ministry services that have been critiqued across this country; questions that have been raised around various policies, procedures and guidelines, and candidacy and settlement...is present in part because this position existed. ...I think their existence is a testimony to the work that has been done by those people - staff people, committee people, by anybody, anywhere who has done education to try and raise consciousness at whatever level that has happened.... If you look at theological schools across the country and the faces that are present there, in terms of gender differentiation, if not racial, some of that is in large part because of the work that happened through DMPE and the questions that got raised.⁵

Another participant noted that there would be far fewer congregations now where

³ The Evaluation Task Group, "Evaluation of the Women in Ministry Committee", 6-7.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Participant's comment.

there had never been a woman preach, than in 1984. "More and more women are in internships; more and more are being settled into pastoral charges; more and more women are chairing presbyteries; are in elected positions, in staff positions - women are just in more positions of leadership in various aspects of church life, and so the question of the whole participation of women in all aspects of life and work of the church looks different now than it did in 1984."⁶

Participants remembered feelings of optimism, energy, and excitement mixed with awe, at the amount of work that was being done at the time, "It was just fabulously exciting and a bit crazy making because there was so much going on."⁷ Reflecting on the significance of the work accomplished, they commented, "I was overwhelmed by what we were able to do," "It was something that was really significant," "It really was a remarkable piece of work."

Regarding the WIM position itself, a participant said, "... one of the things that came to me immediately was that it was a big accomplishment for women around the position."⁸ Another commented, "It is 1997, and we still have, not without a fight, but we still have this position and there are a lot of significant policy changes in the church that are present because that position existed."⁹

EVOLUTION OF THE WIM STAFF POSITION

Since 1984 the WIM staff position has undergone an evolution within the DMPE. The staff position was first implemented with the understanding that it would be evaluated in five years. In 1987, the position was increased to full time for the two year remainder of the five

⁶ Participant's comment.

⁷ Participant's comment.

⁸ Participant's comment.

⁹ Participant's comment.

year term, in order to incorporate responsibility for the development of an affirmative action program for women in ministry. With a reassignment of responsibilities in DMPE in 1989, and the position evaluation completed, the job was confirmed as an ongoing half-time position. Now, though, added to the job description of the WIM staff person, was work related to publications of the Committee on Diaconal Ministry.

In the years 1989 and 1990, the DMPE underwent a redesign, which resulted in a new configuration of job assignments, approved in 1990. A new full-time position was created, Ministry Personnel Support and Advocacy, which combined the work of WIM, the Committee on Diaconal Ministry, and work on the sexual abuse policy. From fifty percent staff support each, the WIM work was reduced to forty percent and the CDM work was reduced to thirty percent, in order to accommodate the growing need for work on the sexual abuse policy. The position was then confirmed as permanent within DMPE.

In 1993, Nancy Sanders took over this position from Ann Naylor, spending a significant amount of time working with the sexual abuse policy and doing general advocacy. As this work continued to increase, sexual abuse was moved out of the WIM responsibilities. A new Sexual Abuse Committee was formed with the understanding that WIM should not have to take continued responsibility for sexual abuse in the church and the work that went with it.

As time went on, less and less time was available for WIM work. Today, seventy-five percent of the time, of the Ministry Personnel Support and Advocacy staff person, is spent doing general advocacy and sexual abuse work, as well as interdivisional advocacy work. The other twenty-five percent is directed to CDM, WIM, and other duties. Increasingly, WIM work is the responsibility of volunteers.¹⁰

¹⁰ Comments from Nancy Sanders, Ministry Personnel Support and Advocacy staff, DMPE, April 24, 1998.

PERSONAL BENEFITS

Among the personal benefits for WIM and WIMOG members identified by the participants were: confidence building, emotional conversion, and a lot of learning about social and political analysis, change, political strategies, and personal learning styles.

Being "involved in the gay and lesbian issues" helped one participant gain more confidence in a sensitive area. Another spoke of overcoming the fear of being, "a very quiet, shy, reserved person who never wanted to be in public leadership." Personal growth also included a movement from naiveté to wisdom, when the work, "was exposing things about us as a church and individuals and communities that weren't nice."¹¹ One participant learned, through participation on WIMOG and other national committees, "to know myself as a particularly gifted, creative person... But what it also gave me was an experience of what not to do as well as what to do in my own journey."¹² For another, her feminist journey brought her to the work of WIMOG and WIM, "That's always been one of the most meaningful parts of my adult life. I got involved in the late 1960's when I was in university and just continued on doing that because it gave me life, it gave me hope, it gave me courage, it gave me a way to articulate my analysis..."¹³

Participants recalled their resistance to dealing with some of the issues that came up for WIMOG and WIM, particularly, sexual harassment and abuse. Both story telling and education seemed to bring "conversion". "When sexual harassment hit our agenda at WIMOG and later on WIM, I can remember my own resistance to it, just as I had resistance in the 1970's toward the women's movement dealing with violence against women. I thought it wasn't an issue and I thought that sexual harassment was not an issue that we needed to be

¹¹ Participant's comment.

¹² Participant's comment.

¹³ Participant's comment.

concerned about. And when people in the Maritimes said, 'There is stuff going on and we need your assistance.' ... we said... that we can't do this without getting some education first."¹⁴ "I still remember that (a story about rape) so vividly and being so horrified. I mean that really got me into the sexual harassment...(issue)."¹⁵ As women in the network began work on sexual abuse and some were willing to talk about their own experiences of violation, one participant said she felt so privileged and overwhelmed that she felt like Mary who, "kept these things in and pondered them in her heart."¹⁶

"I learned enormous things," said one participant, and they did. One woman admitted, "I was only growing to understand that the economic concerns were gender based as well. And I didn't know the word 'sexism' when I came on that committee. I didn't know how to use it... and I didn't know the word 'classism' (even though) poverty and the reality of that, I had lived."¹⁷ For another, "working with that committee in particular and in many ways...sharpened my own analysis and gave me a really profound experience of doing theological reflection and political analysis in a community."¹⁸

Most of the participants learned about church structures and political strategy. "I think I have learned to use policy in a way that contributes to justice, that can be liberative and can call account as well."¹⁹ "I have far more empathy now in terms of (concerns) related to staff and volunteers and what you can say and when, and what you can't and when..."²⁰ One participant noted that she was surprised and delighted that, "you can push back and say to the constituency, 'This is not good enough and we want more, and we want more because you say

¹⁴ Participant's comment.

¹⁵ Participant's comment

¹⁶ Participant's comment.

¹⁷ Participant's comment.

¹⁸ Participant's comment.

¹⁹ Participant's comment.

²⁰ Participant's comment.

we should have more.”²¹ Glenys Huws and Ann Naylor were named as mentors for these women because of their ability to make things happen within the bureaucratic structure of the church.

Participant's shared what they had learned about surviving through this demanding period of change. One participant reflected that her motivation for this work came from both her mother, and the tradition of the United Church. From her mother she learned, “very early on that some things in this world were not right and they were not fair and that there was a responsibility to work toward changing them.” And from the church she realized, “that this was a very United Church thing to do and this was not at all out of step with what the United Church had done over the years.”²² Another remarked that as well as work within the church, she needed to have work outside the institutional church in order to stay grounded. In order to deal with the stresses and tensions around this work, one participant had learned that we need, “to be in touch with our own sense of self, and the healthier we are about what's ours and what's not ours and how healthy we are, then we can also do the processing of what comes at us.” She continued, “I believe you can be a wounded healer...but there is a minimal level of emotional health you have to have in this work or else you would get so hurt or so negatively aggressive that your own spiritual and emotional health would suffer and I don't think you can be very effective.”²³

Another WIMOG member learned about the limits of personal sacrifice in the change process:

I know now that I will not be crucified in order to prove that I'm a Christian. That's not the ...message I got through theological school in the early phase. ...I might choose to die, but I won't be martyred...and it won't be for the church...I very much love the

²¹ Participant's comment.

²² Participant's comment.

²³ Participant's comment.

human people, the incarnational expressions of faith I've met in the church, I love that. I don't love the institution of any denomination.²⁴

Participants commonly expressed feelings of pride and gratitude about their involvement with this work for change for justice:

I don't know that I will ever lose the sense of having been part of something that was really significant in the life of the church in the context of ...this particular incarnation of advocacy for a marginalized group that happened to be women who transcend or cross race, class, culture, orientation. To have lived in a place and time where all of that was seen to be really important and significant and a part of the whole. I really do think it was important to do that. That work was important.²⁵

PERSONAL COSTS

There were also personal costs and losses experienced as part of this work for justice. Burn out, disillusionment, exhaustion, a feeling of dislocation and alienation from other communities and within the committee, and family stresses, plagued many. Participants remembered that there was a "massive amount of work," "we were trying to do too much with too few resources," and "all of us had jobs that came out of this committee and some of us with families," as well as paid employment. Some members recall themselves as vulnerable to personal trauma and felt their "boundless" energy wear down as the work got harder.

The staff position itself was extremely demanding. "I think we set up an impossible task for one person, putting her in a place we thought every woman in ministry across the country would have a contact."²⁶ Some raised questions of long term survival for people in

²⁴ Participant's comment.

²⁵ Participant's comment.

²⁶ Participant's comment.

these positions.

The time and energy commitment, and the growth in consciousness also caused tensions and conflict with partners and families. Part of being female with a male partner could also mean expectations for his support that were role based. "I was leaving sick kids. I was leaving personal issues between my husband and I at that time. I was leaving everything and getting on a plane and you just had to leave."²⁷ The personal was connected to the political in only too real a way for one participant, "I was moving to the radical. He was staying in the liberal. And I saw the liberal as dangerous and he saw the radical as exclusive from another position. ...I really think the personal and political were connected for us."²⁸

Others reported alienation from their communities and colleagues back home. "I was becoming a misfit in my own world, and there was little support for that. So I was having to go home with this old feminist song, 'I Wish My Eyes Had Never Been Opened' awareness and seeing it everywhere, and becoming very bitter." Participants felt, at times, they were judged by some women as being too radical, and by others, as not being radical enough. "There were times when I felt there was a judgment about not being radical enough - what we were doing was not good enough. That was painful, that kind of, not feminist enough."²⁹

Then there were conflicts and tensions between different women on the committee, "we were all at different places and as women, we weren't exactly this happy totally cohesive group." Sometimes there was a sense of betrayal, possibly fed by feelings of inferiority by some, and an outright clash of theology between others, "the most painful discussions in terms of opposition to change in the committee, outside the committee, and in the church, were how all of this related to how we understood Jesus."³⁰

With all the costs and losses, one participant questioned the church's seeming lack of

²⁷ Participant's comment.

²⁸ Participant's comment.

²⁹ Participant's comment.

³⁰ Participant's comment.

responsibility in warning women about the dangers ahead in ministry. She noted that the stories of women who have left or been pushed out of the church have not been told, "and I think until the church tells those stories, it is not going to hold itself accountable."³¹

INSIGHTS AND LEARNINGS

As stories were recalled and shared, gleanings about the process of change emerged. One commented that there has been much change in the last 25 years both inside and outside the church. For her, "the church lives in that tension. It is not separate from it as much as those who think, because we are Christian, that somehow separates us."³² However, another participant affirmed that "a strength or resource in the church is that (change for justice) is not just one of these things we should be doing. This is what our faith calls us to do. We are part of a community of faith that says we treat one another with justice, with love, offer sanctuary. So, our theology offers us a grounded place."³³

An important learning around change was the necessity of giving people the opportunity to speak for themselves," out of their own experience to say, 'These are the gifts we have to offer. These are the things that are blocking our ability to offer these gifts freely and completely in the church.'³⁴

Regarding a theory of change, one participant observed, "if we had waited for this kind of full bodied movement from across the country, ...a lot of people out there would just have gone by the by.... Change doesn't happen just one way, and the catalyst for change from within can, in fact, come from change from the top. In that sense you provide modeling or...raison d'être. ...For those people who are able to use the theory and structures that exist, it

³¹ Participant's comment.

³² Participant's comment.

³³ Participant's comment.

³⁴ Participant's comment.

is important to have that available for them.”³⁵

For some participants, there was a warning sounded that, “the movement to justice is always fragile and so what can be gained can also be lost. And, (we should) not be naive about how quickly that can be lost even without visible malicious intent... I think there has been an intention to stop doing the work, but, it really comes out of a belief that it is not necessary. It is not out of a profoundly racist or sexist character. It is out of a naive, liberal (stance).”³⁶

Work for change for justice can be stressful, “Change is slow, change is difficult, change is threatening.”³⁷ Participants named the need to be “pastoral” and “kind” with each other within the network, especially when external conflicts were inevitable. “Work for change in a way that lives out the values and goals you say you are working toward. The process, the journey is your home.”³⁸

APPLICATIONS TO OTHER SETTINGS

All the women interviewed have moved on into other volunteer and paid work, but they all acknowledged the value of the learnings about change for justice, from their WIMOG or WIM work. They have carried those learnings with them. One woman, working in a secular organization, lamented the absence of any common values or theology amongst her co-workers. “I can get empowered on a justice issue where I can’t necessarily get empowered over this issue I’m in right now.”³⁹ Another acknowledged that her experience in this change process had been pivotal to the work she now does as an educator. A participant, who has now

³⁵ Participant’s comment.

³⁶ Participant’s comment.

³⁷ Participant’s comment.

³⁸ Participant’s comment.

³⁹ Participant’s comment

left traditional ministry within the United Church, says she is, "finally in a place where all of what I've learned in the United Church, I can use...making the connections between the secular and the sacred that I always thought needed to be made and wishing I could be paid for this by the UCC, and knowing it is not possible, which is the sadness."⁴⁰ She says she still works from a consensus base as much as possible and uses the learnings gained through WIMOG work. "I name my position, and the way I've got there, and call people to either challenge that or... pull me to their position... I always thought I had to stay connected to everyone - 'be everything to all people' message of ministry. And now I realize, I can't."⁴¹

One woman, who now works with aboriginal people says, "I learned about what's helpful from the dominant group so, that working with women in ministry...(I learned) what is helpful for men to be saying, also working with diaconal ministers to see what is helpful to come from the ordained. And using those parallels, working with aboriginal people, I've been able to say or do. I think, the right thing. And sometimes, the right thing is just to shut up."⁴²

For a participant who is still in congregational ministry, she says, "...in those early days, I found the easiest places for me to (work for change)... were working with national groups, international groups or ecumenical groups. It took me a long time to make that work for change happen in a very visible public way in the local setting in which I was working. It took me many years... before I offered a course called, 'Feminism and Spirituality'." Through the leadership she saw modeled in WIM, and her experiences there, she realized that. "working for change must be done with others. It must involve the local people... (I changed) in how I saw my work as a change agent within the congregation and (I learned) to let go of how I thought the change should happen... and let them embrace how they thought it should happen even though it wasn't particularly the way I would want to do it. It became extremely

⁴⁰ Participant's comment.

⁴¹ Participant's comment.

⁴² Participant's comment.

important for me in letting people in the local congregation, pick up things in a way that had meaning for them."⁴³ Reminding congregational members, of the mandate and traditions of the church, has also been powerful. "A strategy that I have often used in my preaching and my work, was to call people to that vision of social justice that the United Church has carried from its beginning. 'This is who we are and this is one of the parts of us that we can honour ... This is our commitment to social justice. And this piece of work is about social justice and that's why it fits.'"⁴⁴

In the 1997 United Church Yearbook, Ministry Personnel Services of the Division of MPE are named as "Policy, Support and Advocacy". Under "Advocacy", the WIM committee's work is articulated:

The Women in Ministry Committee continues to work on issues related to: diversity amongst women in ministry with particular focus on issues for racial/ethnic minority women in ministry; women in ministry living with chronic illness/disability; debt loads and financial planning; and employment issues. The NoName Newsletter continues to be a significant resource for women in ministry and women who are students in theological schools. A national conference for women in ministry is being planned for June 1998. Plans are underway for a delegation of women in ministry from the Evangelical Church of the Union in Germany with which the United Church is in covenant partnership to visit Canada and participate in the national conference as part of our recognition of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women in Church and Society.⁴⁵

This present description of WIM work relating to minority women, hearkens back to the connections between racism and sexism that COWIM was making in the 1970's, and the

⁴³ Participant's comment.

⁴⁴ Participant's comment.

⁴⁵ The United Church of Canada Year Book, Vol.II, (Toronto: 1997), 67.

financial resources provided by WIM to racial/ethnic minority women and aboriginal women in ministry as they began organizing for change for justice. One participant noted that, "the journey for change, as it relates to women in MPE, has very often been coupled with issues related to race, whether aboriginal or minority women so that those things have gone tag teamed..."

Significant as the development and implementation of the WIM staff position was, the work of change for justice that was facilitated by that position, still carries on. The work seems to have become increasingly more difficult at this stage where patriarchy is more subtle and the backlash against feminism has a stronghold. "I think the work of the WIM committee is much harder now than it was in the early 1980's, because we could point to some really concrete things, like we have no maternity leave policy... 'We have no policy that says sexual abuse is not okay.' ... We have no support groups.' ... 'We have no resources available.' Now, we do, and so the work becomes much more complex in the face of much less support, because people can say, 'What's the problem?' even though sexism hasn't (disappeared)."⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Participant's comment.

CHAPTER 8.

CONCLUSION

*Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums
but you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.¹*

This research on the development and implementation of the Women In Ministry staff position, has revealed a number of factors that effect and block successful change for justice. Effective factors include: the social and institutional climate of the day, the existence of supportive people in key leadership positions, the development of strategies that challenge existing systems and structures, and the intentionality of the change group in undertaking social analysis, theological reflection and group maintenance. Patriarchy was named as the source of the blocks identified within both church and society. Lack of social analysis and critique, denial of oppression, hostility within a climate of politeness, and bureaucratic complexity were some of the more specific blocks experienced by participants.

The identification of the need for the WIM staff position arose from the work of the Women in Ministry Overview Group (1981-1983), the Co-Deputy Secretary of the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education (1980-1984), and the Inter-Divisional Taskforce on the Changing Roles of Women and Men in Church and Society (1980-1984), later named the Committee on Sexism (1984-present). In 1983, recognizing the increasing numbers of women

¹ Marge Piercy, "To Be of Use" in Cries of the Spirit.

in ministry, the obstacles they faced in the church, and the inadequate staff time available from the portfolio of the Co-Deputy Secretary of DMPE, WIMOG identified the need for a half-time WIM staff person in the Division. This person was to act as an advocate and support for women, addressing the concerns identified by The Taskforce and WIMOG.

Support for this position came from the many initiatives within government, labour and educational institutions, to change policies in order to respond to growing public pressure for women's rights. Factors within the church, such as a growing feminist consciousness, key staff members, parallel work being done by other committees and organizations, and the network of women in ministry across the country, provided affirmation and support for the development and implementation of the WIM position. People in leadership positions played key roles in bringing this position to reality. Those who were specifically mentioned were: Mary Sanderson, Glenys Huws, Harry Oussoron, Mary Thompson Boyd, Shelley Finson, Howie Mills, Frank Meadows, Anne Squire, Barb Elliot and Lorne Taylor-Walsh

The process of approval for the WIM staff position stalled periodically, however, as its reality and implications became more imminent and evident to the church. Protection of male power and privilege within society in general, was still operative as the norm from which to work. Within the church, these same blocks of denial, fear, and entrenched patriarchy also existed and influenced the institution's openness to change.

Strategies such as the use of accountability, community building, creativity, persistence, bridgemaking, education, and strong alliances, eventually combined to overcome the bureaucratic and ideological resistance to the WIM position and the advocacy work of WIMOG and WIM.

Looking back on the process of change for justice, participants were awed at the amount of work accomplished and its importance for the church, for women in ministry, and

for themselves. Through such developments as the policies on sexual harassment and maternity leave, the establishment of the Graduate Awards for Women, and the encouragement of regional and national gatherings, women were given the opportunity to use their gifts for ministry more effectively. Through the establishment of the WIM staff position and the WIM committee, the church was held more accountable to its stated theology and more responsive to women in ministry. Personal benefits for participants included increased self confidence, a deeper sense of personal and political call to a ministry of justice, and an affirmation of the power of women to demand and effect change. The costs of this work for some, however, were considerable: relationships suffered, alienation within communities was experienced, naiveté was lost, and health was put at risk. But, for all the losses and questions, participants clearly attested to the positive power and influence of this experience on their present style and work for change.

The research showed that the WIM staff position reflected different initiatives for advocacy and support. Although its implementation was a significant accomplishment, its existence was only part of the ongoing process of structural and systemic change for justice on behalf of women in ministry. Both WIMOG and WIM played central prophetic roles as tellers of truth and voices against sexism and injustice.

LITERATURE REVISITED

Upon revisiting the literature regarding women in ministry theory, feminist theory, and research methodology, I found that many of the ideas presented there were supported by this study. Analysis of the data and the research process itself, pointed to principles and theories of change noted by many feminists working to dismantle patriarchy.

Literature on women in ministry theory deliberately uplifts the voices and experiences of women who have endured the silencing and hostility of the institutional church.

(Steffenson Hagan, 1995; Winter, Lummis and Stokes, 1994; The Mud Flower Collective, 1985). This study likewise lifts up the voices of diaconal women in ministry as they, with lay and ordained women and men struggled for justice against a wall of institutionalized sexism.² In facing this obstacle, WIMOG and WIM intentionally worked from the kind of diaconal vision and style that authors name as liberative (Heuer and Jones, 1994). This research also revealed an alternative model of church community, that in its actions and functioning, maintained a strong feminist critique of oppressive church structures (Heuer and Jones, 1994).

In brief, this study records a story of women in ministry not previously documented or analysed, a descriptive and content analysis of women's struggle for change toward justice in the church.

Yet within the literature on women in ministry theory, where recommendations, principles and strategies are emphasized, there is an absence, or minimalization, of the costs and risks associated with working for change for justice in the church. This study lifts up the realities of pain and loss experienced by participants. In exposing both the joys and the costs, it is hoped that this study will caution those doing similar work today and in the future.

Another questionable aspect of this literature is the assumption that the interplay of theory and practice is a smooth, continuous process in the work of change for justice. How does this help when we experience, not a spiral of praxis, but a rocky road with stops and starts, dead ends and perilous cliffs? This study uncovered strategies and principles that have been effective for change, yet, indicated the bumps and inconsistencies of a process burdened with social and human limitations.

This research study also affirms feminist principles for transforming existing social structures and creating alternatives articulated within the body of knowledge on feminist

² Kay Heuer and Teresa Jones, "Diaconal Ministry as a Feminist Model of Ministry" in Gathered By the River: Reflections and Essays of Women Doing Ministry (Dundas, ON and Toronto: artemis enterprises and The United Church Publishing House, 1994), 126.

theory. WIMOG and WIM intentionally and effectively employed principles such as: shared leadership, equality of access to power and decision making, the connection of the personal and the political, the commitment to diversity, and the practice of living into hope in the present, as well as the future (Bunch, 1987; hooks, 1984).

My research also supports Maria Mies' idea of the "colonization of production and thinking" that results from patriarchal capitalism (Mies, 1986). Liberal ideology, characterized by a personal rather than a social ethic of justice, was often seen by participants as informing the decisions that were made within the bureaucracy. Over and over, as WIMOG and WIM educated themselves, their constituency, and the church, the patriarchal colonization of liberal thinking was evident. As in any colonization, the values and ideologies of the dominant group within the church went unquestioned by many men and women who worked and thought within this patriarchal framework. Systems preserved power and reward for some, at the expense of many. Liberal institutional structures and systems were perceived as the external form of an ideological captivity rooted in patriarchy.

In the body of literature regarding research methodology, communities of resistance were named as being central to the examination of ideological issues (Harding, 1987; Welch, 1989). This study, by focusing on WIMOG and WIM as communities of resistance within the institutional church structure, has revealed issues of power, sex, domination and change in meaningful ways.

As suggested in the methodology literature, this process of doing research and creating theory certainly empowered all who participated. Interviewees shared reflections of their personal growth in the process of structural change and I gained insight into the many factors which promote and impede change for justice. Through hearing personal stories about this struggle, I felt renewed and hopeful. I gained a sense of realism and perspective about feminist advocacy work and a deeper sense of appreciation for the learning and loving involved in communities of resistance. As a woman in ministry, I found it particularly

powerful to see myself as part of a long history of women who brought and are bringing hope, creativity and energy to the challenging task of justice making.

Lacking in the literature reviewed on research methodology, however, was the influence of participants' memories on the process and content of the research. The distance of thirteen years from the events under study, sometimes caused interviewees to doubt the accuracy and completeness of their memories. Although interview methods that rely on personal perceptions are accepted as the legitimate basis for qualitative research, there were few cautions given in the qualitative research theory reviewed on how memory effects the gathered data and the data gathering process.

In sum, my research affirms many ideas within the body of literature I reviewed for this study. It also reveals gaps within and a critique of the literature. I also realize that for the further study of feminist change processes by qualitative research methods, I need to review the literature on memory and its effect on data gathering and analysis; liberal ideology and its consequences for social change; and the personal costs of the work of change for justice.

FURTHER TOPICS OF INQUIRY

Further topics of inquiry that could not be accommodated within the scope of this research include biographical studies of women in leadership positions within church bureaucracies. Such studies would be helpful in further exploring personal survival strategies, and consequences for women in ministries of critique and challenge within the institutional system. At this point at the end of the Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women in Church and Society, 1998, there is a need for a retrospective study on the influence of the WIM staff position, in helping bring about change toward justice for women in the church. Research, using the experiences of women who have left traditional church ministry, would further develop knowledge around the issues of sexism that challenged WIMOG and WIM.

Heterosexism, homophobia and racism are other expressions of patriarchy to be studied qualitatively with women who have worked in the churches for justice for lesbians and gay men, and peoples of colour. Another suggestion for further research would be to study ministries of justice endorsed by the church and to examine whether the feminist model, or others like it, are meaningfully introduced and tested within theological school curriculum.

AREAS OF POTENTIAL APPLICATION

If we are to live an inclusive, liberative theology, as ministry personnel and as congregational members, we can both "take heart" and learn from the experiences of the WIMOG and WIM committees in working for change for justice.

Within congregations, Ministry and Personnel Committees, need to be educated to the obstacles for women in ministry, such as traditional understandings of leadership, devaluing of women's work, and sex role stereotyping, and be prepared to encourage relationships of support and safety for them. They must also be prepared to assess their own congregational climate and take steps to challenge and change practices and structures that perpetuate sexism. Presbytery Pastoral Relations Committees and Conference Personnel Ministers have a responsibility to educate these groups in the interest of encouraging strong and long lasting pastoral relationships between women in ministry and their congregations.

The WIMOG and WIM committees can be compared to the persistent widow who hounds the judge until she gets justice. For God, who continually calls us to work on in the struggle for justice, we need persistence and vigilance. While we are persevering, women in ministry need community support. Challenging patriarchal systems inside and outside the church cannot be done alone or without costs. When we are nurtured within a community of justice seekers, we have a much better chance of success and survival. Finding "our people" and being for others within church structures, is essential. Other women and men, who can act

as mentors, guides, companions and friends on the journey, keep us accountable to our vision and encourage us on the way as we do for them.

In whatever work for justice our congregations are involved, it is important to affirm and connect these ministries with United Church of Canada social gospel tradition. Our grappling with difficult issues and taking sometimes unpopular stands, is nothing new. Remembering who we are as God's people struggling for exodus, for liberation from oppression, for manna for the journey, helps us put our difficulties into prophetic perspective. In diaconal ministry, we need to encourage women in groups to articulate their struggles in theological terms and encourage them to draw on the communion of women saints, past and present, for hope and strategies for change.

Listening to the voices of women is crucial for true social change and diaconal ministry. When we know what people "should" be thinking, we are not working with them, living 'diakonia', any longer. Encouraging story telling in our congregations, on the way to social analysis and critique, is the beginning of empowerment. Creating safe places for women to speak the truth of their lives in community is the beginning of conscientization. Helping congregations to name their mission in justice terms and then, to clarify its implications for all aspects of their ministry, enables social change. In basing diaconal ministry in the congregation's mission, setting job priorities, and doing assessments and evaluations of our ministry would be more meaningful. We also need to remember, that as diaconal ministers, we are entitled to ask for more when situations of harassment, abuse, inequity, or exploitation occur.

As prophetic groups challenging the injustices within church structures, the Committee on Diaconal Ministry, the Women in Ministry Committee, and the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women groups and their regional and local counterparts, need to continue to monitor and challenge the work of the larger church, claiming their theological and denominational mandates, whenever possible.

The model of WIMOG and WIM reminds us that when we are intentional in building community, in listening to those who are marginalized, in making connections between the personal and the political and aligning ourselves with people and groups who are also seeking justice, we can move mountains. Like the widow entreating the judge, it is possible. It is hard work, but it is possible.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

Working on this research project was stimulating, revealing, moving and important for me. The wealth of ideas, theories and questions it has generated affirm what I know about myself as a learner - that I love learning and it happens best when I am engaged directly in a personal way. I have felt the privilege of hearing personal stories and church history from women whom I admire. I feel grateful to them not only for their willingness and openness in sharing with me but also for the courage, wisdom and strength they brought to this work of change for justice. Because of their work for the affirmation and support of women's gifts in ministry, my life and work in ministry is less threatened, more secure. There are now policies and procedures in place that take women's lives seriously, and advocacy staff who will respond to issues or difficulties faced by women in ministry. And I work in ministry at a time when, because many obstacles have been removed, the network of women in ministry is strong and women can be found on faculty in theological schools and in all the courts of the church.

My work, however, is not without fears of hostility from within the congregation or other courts of the church, or "friendly fire" from other women. It may be easier to communicate the issues for women now, but there are more difficulties such as reduced funding and an overall social and church climate of retrenchment. Prophetic naming still brings with it backlash that can amount to isolation or job loss in a declining church

environment.

The question of how best to work for personal and political good as a radical feminist within the church is an ongoing concern for me. Interviews brought me to tears as I listened to those same fears and concerns articulated by participants. Listening to their stories gave me hope and reminded me of the power of women's friendships in working for justice. Hearing the work and struggles of WIMOG and WIM gave me a touchstone and model for the work in which I am involved, in a congregation, and at regional, national and ecumenical levels of the church. I heard the power and the limitations of the work of a community of resistance. I also heard diaconal vision and style lived out. I was reminded that change for justice is a lifelong process so we must taste abundant life occasionally in order to keep working for it as a goal.

One of my hopes in working on this project was to convince myself that transformation for justice in the church and the world really is possible. The pastoral, prophetic and impatient me sometimes gets discouraged. I ask myself, "Is it worth it? Is it possible? What should I expect? How much do I risk?" This experience has helped me be more realistic about the messiness of work for justice, yet also see the utter joy of throwing oneself into the change process. It has taught me to be more wise in using the systems and structures that are in place in order to redeem them for liberative purposes. It has reminded me to work at pushing courts of the church to be accountable to their own stated policies, procedures, and mandates - to keep going back to the decisions already approved and lobbying for implementation. It has affirmed my experiences that work for change needs to happen within groups, and that intentionality regarding task and process, theological reflection and political strategizing, is critical.

This study has stopped me short and brought a different lens to my congregational work. It has forced me to reflect on my own style of ministry and to ask myself what is possible when working for justice within a congregation. The research has also reminded me to be patient with the learning process. My tendency to skip to theory and action and impose

my conclusions was effectively stymied. Being in the position of researcher, where my purpose was to hear others' stories, slowed me down enough to reaffirm the importance of listening and reflection in the learning cycle. It reminded me of the need to listen, as well, to members of my congregation and reflect with them, before moving into theorizing. It is humbling to realize how far off the mark I can get even as I espouse feminist theories and diaconal practice!

In the mix of pain, joy, frustration and wisdom that I experienced in this research study, I felt myself initiated and carried along in the long and hopeful history of women who have also felt compelled, called, and challenged to keep on with "fierce tenderness", and "massive patience" to bring about God's long promised new heaven and earth. As Mary Hunt says, I have a "political vision of fierce tenderness in action. ...My conviction is that theology...can motivate the deep reflection and personal conversion that sustain efforts at political change."³ I believe that WIMOG and WIM lived into this hope with more success than many in this long struggle for justice. I am indebted in many ways to the members of those groups, and to those who carry on.

³ Mary Hunt, Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1994), 9.

To be of use

Marge Piercey

*The people I love the best
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.
they seem to become natives of that element,
the black sleek heads of seals
bouncing like half-submerged balls.*

*I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
who do what has to be done, again and again.*

*I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go out in the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along,
who stand in the line and haul in their places,
who are not parlor generals and field deserters
but move in a common rhythm
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.*

*The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.*

*Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums
but you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.*

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