

WOMEN'S

PERSPECTIVES

CELEBRATING

the 100th Anniversary of the Diaconal Order

PART 2

Editorial

By Maureen Walter

I am not a diaconal minister. But I was raised by one. From the time I could walk, my mother, JoAnne Walter, dragged me to the library and read me books. Unsurprisingly, I learned to read ahead of my peers, and remained an avid reader all my life. Only later did I figure out that my mother had studied the latest early childhood education methods at Ewart College - years ahead of many other educational institutions - and used them all on me!

There was never a time when my mother was not a vital leader in the congregation we attended. She was the minister's wife, but in her own right she led groups, organized events, educated youth and adults, served on national and ecumenical committees and had the trust and respect of all who knew her. We always had a world view in my house - there was always a concern about world mission, and justice and peace. No political discussion was too complex, as family conversations routinely considered the consequences of our actions and our government's actions in the life of the world. And those conversations are ongoing!

My upbringing led me to respect the varied and intense work of the Diaconal Order. So I was excited to assist in editing these two issues, prepared by Donna McIlveen and her committee, on the Order of Diaconal Ministry in the PCC. So rich and varied were the articles that what was originally planned to be a single issue to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the Order, has now become two issues. Enjoy!

{Maureen is a minister and lawyer, married with two daughters, and living in Toronto. Her brother, Scott Walter, also raised and educated by JoAnne, works to support literacy around the world, and is the CEO of CODE (Canadian Organization for Development through Education). Mom's methods work!}

In This Issue...

February 2009

Issue 70

Editorial by Maureen Walter	p. 1
Celebrating the Past— Welcoming the Future by Emma Barron	p. 2
Two Historical Excerpts	p. 3
ODM Connects with Diaconal Ministries by Margaret Robertson	p. 4
The Kaleidoscope by Joyce Hodgson	p. 6
Serving as a Youth Leader by Christine Ball	p. 7
Beyond Expectations! by Nita DeVenne	p. 8

The Council on the Order of Diaconal Ministries

By Mrs. Emma (Elton) Barron (designated 1962)

Given the task of reflecting on the past 100 years of the Order of Deaconesses/Diaconal Ministries, I was reminded of the labours of people who made great commitments and achieved much.

As a working deaconess in the 1960's, I was quite excited about my calling but became aware that deaconesses, as women and professional church workers, lacked sufficient voice in the courts of the Church. As well, there was a need for us to have a vehicle for developing fellowship, sharing work experiences, and for supporting each other.

Following my election as President of the newly formed Council of the Order of Deaconesses in 1968, I reported to the General Assembly Committee on the Order of Deaconesses.

Acting upon the approval of the 93rd General Assembly (1967), a meeting was held on June 14 and 15, 1968 in Ewart College for the purpose of establishing the Council of the Order of Deaconesses of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. All active deaconesses were invited (31 were able to attend) and non-active members were represented as the result of a postal vote (7 attended). From this historic meeting a number of recommendations were made and handed down to the new executive to study and take whatever action deemed necessary. The purpose of the Council is outlined on page 5, Section II, paragraph 3 (b) of "The Deaconess in The Presbyterian Church in Canada" booklet. The executive is attempting to provide regional gatherings for its members and to strengthen the work of the deaconess through various means. It is seeking and struggling to renew its structure which has in the past proven itself useful and is now re-examining the situation today and asking where are we going and how might we serve the life and work of the whole people of God.

Meetings have been held ever since this gathering. Much renewal has taken place and members have been able to celebrate achievements, share, and give leadership to one another

in formulating and expressing collective views of our membership.

I found my own congregational work quite exciting and challenging. This was due in part to working with some very special clergy who were excited about their ministry as well. At that time, our work was quite varied. It included, for example, home visiting, offering support and care when and where needed, hospital visits, meeting and welcoming new immigrants, inner city work, ethnic work, and giving Christian education leadership such as interpreting new curriculum.

In the 1960's, there were many children involved in church groups. This ministry with children was an important focus of my work.

Further, I recall an adult study group that used as a resource the critically acclaimed book by Pierre Berton entitled *The Comfortable Pew*. This progressed into an adult study series involving noteworthy speakers on the question of what it meant to be a Christian in the everyday world of work.

Today, we find significant differences. There are generally fewer children in the Church and membership in congregations has declined. A further sign of change is the fact that there have been no designations to the work of diaconal ministries since 1996. However, our members now have the opportunity, through additional studies, to be ordained to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments.

The challenging question we have before us now is, what will become of our Order and how will it affect the life and witness of our beloved Church. What and where will the Holy Spirit lead us?

Much of what transpired for our Council in the Order of the Deaconess--now Diaconal Ministries--is recorded in the 92nd General Assembly Acts and Proceedings of 1966 (pages 296-300), the General Assembly Acts and Proceedings of 1967 (pages 304-308) and 1968 (pages 250-253).

Mrs. Emma Barron (designated 1962) resides in Pembroke, Ontario and is retired keeping busy with family, church and community activities.

From A History of the Deaconess in the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the article Through the Years – the book has no page numbers)

“One of the regulations adopted by the General Assembly was that each deaconess should make an annual report to the (Deaconess) Board. The report of the Board to the 1910 General Assembly included the report of Miss Lissa Glendinning who was the first graduate of the Training Home to be designated as a deaconess. She served in Moose Jaw, under the session of St. Andrew’s Church, and wrote:

“My work has been varied; being to assist the pastor in getting new comers into the Church and Sabbath School; to help in the various organizations of the Church; to visit the sick and those in trouble; to visit the poor and endeavour to supply their needs; to visit non-church goers, get them interested in the Church and bring them to the Church services; to befriend the strangers and get them into touch with new friends, and to help the unemployed to find employment. The supreme object of all Deaconess Work is, of course, to save the soul.”

From the Glad Tidings September 1958 issue, page 22, an article appears entitled “The Deaconess – Her Many Avenues of Service”.

This article consists of glimpses into the many avenues of service that were available to members of the Order 50 years after its establishment. Members had a deep desire to open the door of faith in their respective avenues of service. Included were glimpses of service from the perspective of work undertaken overseas, in a congregation, both suburban and downtown, immigration assistance, work on a First Nations reserve, institutional work and as a hospital worker. Ellen Douglas (designated 1930) who served in many areas, wrote her article from the perspective of a hospital worker.

As a Hospital Visitor
By Ellen Douglas

“I was sick and ye visited me, in prison and ye came unto me.” To be hospitalized and deprived of the normal freedom of health is for many to be in prison. The mind is imprisoned by fears for different kinds – home responsibilities, a future life incapacitated by physical handicaps, and often fear of death itself. To the visiting deaconess comes the opportunity of following the precept of Christ, carrying with her the good news that true freedom, inner renewal even though the ‘outward man’ perished, peace that passes understanding, life abundant and eternal, are the Saviour’s gift to all who believe.”

ODM Connects with Diaconal Ministers around the World

By The Rev. Margaret Robertson (designated 1967)



The Order of Diaconal Ministries has not only had a long history in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, but has a historical connection with deaconesses, diaconal ministers and deacons around the world.

We are connected through DIAKONIA World Federation (World Federation of Diaconal Associations and Diaconal Communities), being in one of three regions. Ours is DIAKONIA of the Americas and the Caribbean (DOTAC). Both levels provide conferences and connections with brothers and sisters around the world – diaconal ministers, deaconesses and deacons. The other regions are DIAKONIA Region Africa-Europe (DRAE) and DIAKONIA Asia-Pacific (DAP).

The World Federation president, Louise Williams, wrote in the March 2008 newsletter:

Through DIAKONIA World Federation we share a special friendship – a gift from God to encourage and inspire us

all in the work we do and the lives we live...

After Jesus took the role of a servant and washed the disciples' feet, later that same evening he said, "I no longer call you servants but friends."...

Friendship means that there is no longer a hierarchical relationship but a mutual one. In that mutuality, friends give to one another and receive from one another.

Friendship says it all. It is amazing to participate in conferences on global and regional levels. Our differences at some levels may be vast, but our calling is the same. We are called to diaconal ministry in

the various forms, situations and places.

Some minister with sufficient training, some with very little. Some work in crisis situations, others in quiet peaceful places. Some denominations have diaconal workers; others come inquiring how an order can be established. Some work in the most difficult of situations (extreme poverty, abuse, persecution, war, tsunami, earthquake, hurricane, HIV/AIDS pandemic and more), others in affluence and plenty.

We find that, even though our circumstances, our training and our backgrounds are vastly different, we are all driven by the Gospel to serve. We are all called to ministry.

We come from Great Britain, Germany, Netherlands, Tanzania, Brazil, South Africa, Australia, Caribbean, Indonesia, Switzerland, Malawi, Egypt, France, Nigeria, Kenya, Canada, South Africa, Cameroon, Rwanda, Zambia

ODM Connects with Diaconal Ministers around the World (continued)

and more. We are truly a global Christian community, united in Christ.

Each region meets every four years. DOTAC met in Trinidad in July 2006. World Federation also meets every four years. Our last one was in Durham, England 2005, with the theme “Diakonia at the Margins – Challenge and Hope”. Our next world conference is scheduled for July 20-27 at Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, USA. Our theme is “Diakonia – Crossroads of Grace – Revive and Reconcile”. You may access information from the web site at www.diakonia-world.org Lynda Reid and I are involved in the planning of this event.

At this point in my life I am privileged to have attended the World event in Durham, England and the regional one in Trinidad. I am planning to be in Atlanta for the next world event.

Currently I serve on DOTAC Central Committee, representing our Order of Diaconal Ministries and with the responsibility of newsletter editor. We meet annually to report on behalf of our member organizations, to encourage and support one another and to plan for upcoming conferences. I am new to the committee, having participated in meetings in Trinidad and New York city. We meet next Nov 10-14 in Asheville, North Carolina. You may access this web site at www.dotac.diakonia-world.org

The world-wide network of diaconal workers is not just about getting together and swapping stories. It’s about sharing our ministry experiences and growing in our faith. It is about learning from, and understanding each other – all children of God in God’s kingdom. It’s about friends giving and receiving in the name of Jesus Christ.

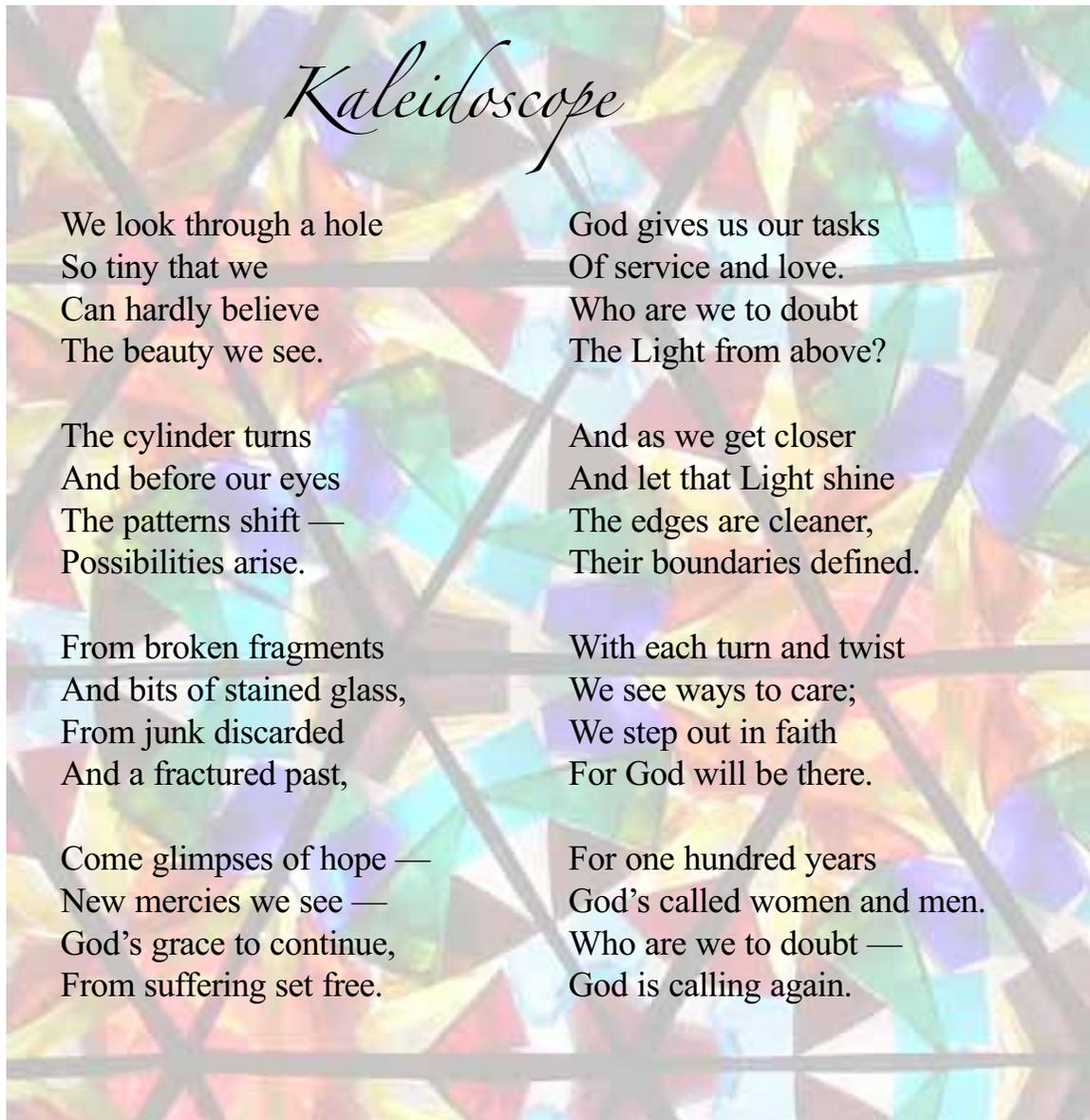
The Rev. Margaret Robertson (designated 1967) resides in Wyevale, Ontario and has served the church working in Christian education, mission education and pastoral ministry, and is currently serving as Minister of Word and Sacraments for the congregations of Elmvale and Knox, Flos in the Presbytery of Barrie.



By The Rev. Joyce Hodgson (designated 1989)

The Order of Diaconal Ministries celebrated their 100th anniversary at a gathering from September 21-23, 2008. The theme was “Transitions: Changed From Glory into Glory”, and the facilitator was the Rev. Dr. Emily Rodgers. One aspect of our celebration was making and using a kaleidoscope. We were challenged as we turned the kaleidoscope to examine what we view – to see the changes – to see the colours move around, the hue deepen or lighten, the shape altered - - all the while acknowledging that as long as the source of light is present the potential for viewing something beautiful doesn't fade.

In response to the challenges put forward at the anniversary celebration, the Rev. Joyce Hodgson (designated 1989) wrote the following poem:



The Rev. Joyce Hodgson (designated 1989) resides in Sarnia, Ontario and is currently serving as Minister of Word and Sacraments for the congregation of Laurel-Lea-St. Matthew's in the Presbytery of Lambton-West Middlesex.

Christine Ball (designated 1984)



As a member of the Diaconal Order I have experienced the joy and challenges of serving youth in a variety of capacities and settings. Working at numerous camps I have watched with great interest as young campers grew and developed into wonderfully capable youth leaders. I served at Flora House Inner-City and Native Ministry with the children and youth in Winnipeg's North End. I have also lead youth groups in small town and large city congregations, sometimes as church staff and sometimes as a volunteer leader. Now as Regional Staff, I have experienced youth ministry that connects youth with their peers in the larger church through the efforts of Presbyteries, Synod and the National Church.

I am grateful for the Diaconal Training I received at Ewart College as it afforded me solid preparation for youth ministry. Ewart training provided strong theological and Biblical foundations, theories of faith, social and cognitive development, as well as educational and ministry theory. I was encouraged to seek out and evaluate good resources, and most importantly, I learned that my role was not "to do" programs but to facilitate and let the whole people of God participate in the ministry.

I feel that my role in youth ministry is a supportive and facilitating one as I prepare youth to undertake the ministry they are capable of engaging. While serving in Chatham, our congregation hosted the "Summer Experience" initiative. Youth from the synod lead a week long summer VBS and put on an evening musical production. The Summer Experience youth shared their gifts of music, drama, teaching and leading, but most significantly they shared the gift of their presence. The families that billeted these young people were particularly blessed and touched by them. The children felt special to have one of their teachers staying in their home. The host families participated in a pool party and barbeque at the end of the week to say thank-you where the youth and children played and ate together. Every one of those kids spoke of their desire to "some day join the Summer Experience"

themselves. That summer is remembered fondly by the children, and as the years have flown by, the children, now young people themselves, have encountered their mentoring leaders at Canada Youth and other church events. It is good to be a part of a connected church.

The greatest pleasure in youth ministry is watching the young folks grow from immature Junior High children, into wonderfully talented and capable young adults, ready to be leaders in their universities, jobs, community and church. One day as I drove two grade-eight youths home from a weekend retreat, they evaluated the weekend experience. They had been particularly frustrated by the grade-six boys' lack of maturity and preoccupation with uncouth topics". At one point, they turned to me and asked, "Christine, were we like that when we were twelve?" Yes, they too, had been immature but now they were teenagers ready to face the upcoming challenges of high school. The same youth are now at university and are leaders in their congregations. Among many activities, they represent their congregations at Canada Youth, they act as counselors, leaders and volunteers at church summer camps, and they plan and lead youth worship at the Presbytery. Their experiences in Canada and around the world on YIM Mission Trips and with other organizations have ignited a passion for serving God as they plan their careers. They have grown in stature and in faith.

As a Member of the Diaconal Order serving as a youth leader, it is a joy to have a small part in facilitating and advocating for youth in the church. It is an even greater joy to watch children grow into teenagers and young adults who are faithful, committed and confident in their God-given gifts.

Mrs. Christine Ball (designated 1984) resides in Kanata, Ontario and is serving as Regional Staff for the Synod of Quebec and Eastern Ontario, including mission education, youth ministry, Christian Education and leadership development

Nita DeVenne (designated 1990)

My journey in Ministry has unfolded in various and somewhat surprising ways including work in 2 congregations as well as at Ewart College, receptionist in a funeral home; and now, 15 years in hospital chaplaincy where I have truly found my niche. I also do volunteer pastoral care in a long-term care facility and in my home congregation.

Early Influences

We had denominational conflict at home between Anglican and Presbyterian, so early training was sketchy, although we attended St. Paul's, Presbyterian in Hampton, New Brunswick while on the farm in the 1940's. Our Baptist Primary teacher taught us prayers and hymns. Moving to Nova Scotia in 1950 we didn't become established at church. During a family crisis in June 1955 a beloved teacher, Margaret Sylvester, challenged me to trust in God. Neighbours took mother, sister and me to First Presbyterian, New Glasgow on Christmas Day 1955. I became active in the Presbyterian Young People's Society (PYPS) and joined the church in October 1956. The following spring I met some of the Presbyterian Missionary and Deaconess Training School (PMDTS) choir on tour and was interviewed by Margaret Webster during her speaking tour campaigning for the new '156'. I was unclear about exactly what deaconesses did. My curiosity was whetted by articles in the Presbyterian Record and through meeting students Roberta Shaw, Christine Shaw and Georgine Caldwell at camp. I was further intrigued after helping with Vacation Bible School (VBS) and meeting graduates Margaret MacDougall and in 1960, Susan Sylvester (Class of 1917) who was the sister of the teacher mentioned above. It occurs to me that 1958 was the 50th Anniversary of the Order. My minister had suggested there might be a place for me in settlement work although I don't recall being enthusiastic. I enjoyed teaching the junior children and the activities at young peoples' society.

As often happens, the way was not smooth sailing, with opposition first at home and later from some people in positions of authority in the Church. The PMDTS Admissions Committee was concerned there might not be work upon graduation. I entered training in 1960 six weeks after my mother died from a brief illness. Susan

Sylvester had me stay with her and came to another town to play for the funeral service. It 'felt right' being at PMDTS and in an ordered life. During three summer appointments I encountered a variety of challenges – at Camp Geddie in 1961 and the following two summers in Winnipeg. During the first I did surveying for a settled congregation, St. David's and also for the new extension Westwood Congregation. I also did teacher training, VBS, and camps but no survey work the second summer.

Ministry Experiences

There were a couple of 'job freezes' in the church upon graduation in 1963 so I pursued educational upgrading while working in reception at Ewart College and supervising the residence in the summers (where some teachers were twice and three times my age). In 1966-67 I was deaconess at Wychwood Presbyterian Church, Toronto. This was an 8-month contract doing outreach, home visiting and attending all women's groups. There I realized the importance of the Christian Education training and skills I had gained through my training, but I was not mandated to assist these groups. I do not recall ever participating in a service of worship, any committee or Session (pre-women's ordination). I was happy there and optimistic there would be similar work ahead. Unfortunately, there was none. I also continued to work part-time in reception at the college.

At the end of this contract I was offered a position in the office and library at Ewart. While working early morning and evenings, I took a part-time course in dictaphone transcription at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB). What a year! I thought I'd be at Ewart about 5 years. I rounded out 22 at the time of the amalgamation with Knox College in summer 1990. Initially I was challenged, particularly by the library work, and excited to be at the college. I also completed a Certificate in Library Arts through 13 years part-time study at Ryerson, graduating in 1982. I had the privilege of meeting many visitors from overseas and across Canada. Many of the national church committees met there and conference delegates stayed there. I met and assisted some of the finest young people from across our church as they trained and lived at Ewart.

Transitions

In April 1990 two events occurring within a few days changed the course of my life. There was a movement within the Order. Margie MacLeod and Joyce Davis phoned on a Monday and Wednesday asking whether I'd considered Designation. In the 1960s neither the short contract I had completed, nor work at Ewart met requirements for designation. On the Thursday I was informed our Board had decided the library position would end December 31st. I was not to say anything because the General Assembly was still to meet. The June meeting of East Toronto Presbytery granted my request for Designation. I felt so much elation and deep sadness during those months. Losing one's job is devastating, and even more so when it is via the Church. I recognized that planning for the service on September 23, 1990 and the service itself was a gift from God. These activities carried me through that difficult time and through the following months as I dismantled the library, and the community I'd known for so many years dissolved.

I was given people who helped me survive that time and the next few years. The early weeks of 1991 were a time of mourning, but led by the Spirit and supportive friends, I found new communities. I had more time to give to Calvin church and was ordained an Elder in March. I began volunteering in pastoral care at Fudger House, a long-term care facility 5 minutes walk from home. I visited with residents, and for 3 years led worship on the Special Care unit adapting curriculum designed for four year-olds for use with these adults. I still lead a monthly Presbyterian/inter-faith service in the chapel.

I discovered joy working with elderly people and a very supportive supervising chaplain, Herbert Harms, who became a mentor and a friend. In the first few years I went to interviews for library positions until I gradually realized my heart was no longer in that work. I worked for a year or so at a funeral home greeting mourners and serving refreshments. In all the sadness there were funny incidents. Gathering my experiences I embarked on my first supervised field placement at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in 1993-1994 and in the winter of 1995 at Scarborough General. In May 1994 The Hospital for Sick Children hired me as an on-call chaplain and I continue to work there. In March 1993, on

the last day for public tours, I went to see this new place never dreaming I'd be there the following year. I'd decided I wanted to see it.

Since then I've worked on-call in most of the downtown hospitals on honorarium. A few lucky breaks came with four contracts at the Toronto East General, a community hospital where the atmosphere is friendlier as at the children's hospital. In March 2003 I was at East General for a month while someone was on vacation. I also took on a 7-10 hour/week position as parish worker at the First Evangelical Lutheran church, a German-English congregation. How did I get there? From Easter 1998 I attended while on duty, when I could leave a nearby hospital. So I came to know the pastor and a few people. Pastor Belzing was struggling with Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma from 2001. Interim pastors were helping. It was a difficult situation with no one wanting to commit to projects. In the autumn I assisted the pastor by visiting shut-ins when he returned from sick leave. This was an interim position till a German speaking minister could be hired. Pastor Belzing died New Year's Day 2004. I remain in contact with First Lutheran through Bible study and friends there. There was 37 years between the work at Wychwood and at First. At the same time East General kept me on staff till September because of the SARS outbreak. During the second outbreak I was asked to serve as chaplain to the SARS units because the Director was occupied with her summer students.

I experience deep joy, many challenges and much satisfaction in this ministry. Due to the very confidential nature of the work I cannot tell stories, although there are many. However, there have been some memorable incidents, including in 1995 my first summer at St. Michael's Hospital; my first Code Orange the night of the subway train crash; and Y2K weekend on the 15th floor pastoral offices at Mount Sinai when actually nothing happened and at midnight I joined the CCU staff for a New Year's Snack. The following weekend while I was on duty, a hydro vault exploded under The Hospital for Sick Children, filling the building with smoke. I was assigned to the Emergency Department so missed the evacuation of the Neonatal unit to Mount Sinai Hospital across the street. Everyone was very calm as they dealt with the crisis.

The SARS outbreak was frightening since we didn't know what we were dealing with and patients felt isolated and lonely. Volunteers were not allowed access to patients. One day at Toronto East General I accompanied a priest to CCU where he wasn't permitted in the room so had to give the blessing through the window. Each morning it took 15 minutes or more to 'dress' in our scrubs to do rounds of SARS areas. We looked simply wonderful! Life at The Hospital for Sick Children hasn't been without its frightening moments either, as when security personnel accompanied the chaplain and a family from the Emergency Department to another waiting room, and then gave the chaplain their telephone number in case the parents begin fighting again. The chaplain stays in the trauma room with the parents unless staff needs the space. We help the parents through this new and unfamiliar situation.

I give thanks for many rewarding and fulfilling experiences through these years - indeed more than I ever dreamed could happen.

Miss Nita DeVenne (designated 1990) resides in Toronto and is retired

Women's Perspectives (WP) strives to keep women in touch with each other and share their theological perspectives, biblical insights, special interests, joys and concerns with the whole church. WP is published 6 times yearly. It is written by guest editors and overseen by WP Committee, in co-operation with the Women in Ministry Committee.

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Readers comments and contributions are welcome at womensperspectives@presbyterian.ca

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