

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

Presider: The Very Rev. Marion Pardy

Call to Worship:

We have gathered to worship God.

**We have come seeking comfort,
inspiration, community and insight.**

We have come to open ourselves
to the power of God's presence in our midst.

**We have come to offer up the seasons
and turnings of our lives,
and to ask God's help
in our learning and our growing.**

Celebrate God's Presence

Hymn 387 Loving Spirit

Opening Prayer:

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

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

Hymn 16: Mary, Woman of Promise

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

The Wisdom: 893 *Wisest One, Radiant One*

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

Wilma Cade

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

Reflection:

Elizabeth Eberhart-Moffat

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

Prayer for Repentance and Forgiveness

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

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

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

O God, we call.
O God we call.
From deep inside we yearn.
From deep inside we yearn for you.

Open your church to the truths of its past in regard to "women in ministry".
Heal the individual and corporate wounds of our practices.
Pour out your wisdom to understand a better way.
Empower the church to create policies and live practices that are just, respectful and celebrative of women.

O God, we call.
O God we call.
From deep inside we yearn.
From deep inside we yearn for you.

God is a God of grace and a God of history.
We are created in God's image and we are responsible.

By God's mercy the church is forgiven.
By God's mercy we are able to be transformed
By God's mercy we are committed
to honour all women's ministries
and to policies and practices of justice towards all people.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

Joan K. McMurtry

Woman's Creed

I BELIEVE IN GOD who created woman and man in God's own image
who created the world and gave both sexes the care of the earth.

I BELIEVE IN JESUS child of God, chosen of God, born of the woman Mary who listened
to women and liked them who stayed in their homes who discussed justice with them who
was followed and financed by woman disciples.

I BELIEVE IN JESUS who discussed theology with a woman at a well
and first confided in her his messiahship
who motivated her to go and tell her great news to the city.

I BELIEVE IN JESUS who received anointing from a woman who rebuked the men guests
who scorned her who said this woman will be remembered for what she did to minister to
Jesus.

I BELIEVE IN JESUS who healed a woman on the Sabbath and made her whole because
she was a human being.

I BELIEVE IN JESUS who spoke of God as a woman seeking the lost coin as a woman
who swept, seeking the lost.

I BELIEVE IN JESUS who thought of pregnancy and birth with reverence
not as punishment but a wrenching event
a metaphor for transformation born again anguish-into-joy.

I BELIEVE IN JESUS who spoke of himself as a mother hen who would gather her chicks
under her wing.

I BELIEVE IN JESUS who appeared first to Mary Magdalene who sent her with the
bursting message. GO AND TELL.

I BELIEVE IN THE WHOLENESS OF THE SAVIOR in whom there is neither Jew nor
Greek slave nor free male nor female
for we are all one in salvation.

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT as she moves over the waters of creation and over the
earth.

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT the woman spirit of God
who like a hen created us and gave us birth
and covers us with her wings.

*Rachel C. Wahlberg from Prayers & Poems, Songs & Stories Ecumenical Decade: Churches in
Solidarity With Women*

Words of Appreciation and Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Right Rev. Peter Short

Words of Response: Wilma Cade

Hymn 899: *My Soul Gives Glory to My God*

The Blessing:

Return now to our world with its pain and wonder,
remembering the words of the prophets,
the faithfulness of Mary,
and the longing of all
who yearn for a sign of hope.
And may the blessing of God who is ever faithful,
the blessing of Christ who still comes to us,
and the blessing of the Holy Spirit who moves within us
and throughout our world,
rest upon us and abide with us, this day and forevermore.
Amen.

Marion Pardy
from Worship For All Seasons, Volume 1, CGP

Apology to United Church Deaconesses and Ordained Women

Mary Anne MacFarlane

The “Disjoining” Rule

At the time of Church union, the United Church inherited two deaconess Orders with rich but very different histories – the Methodist Deaconess Order and the Presbyterian Order. An Inter-Board Committee on Deaconess Workers was established to bring together the two groups, and to care for and direct the United Church’s new Deaconess Order. One of the first things the Committee did was to review and make decisions about a number of policies which had historically governed the work of deaconesses and which had been agreed to at the time of Union.

The Inter-Board Committee decided to continue a rule which stated that a deaconess could not continue to work as a deaconess or maintain membership in the Order when she married. The regulation required all deaconesses to resign from their positions and from the Order, by letter, previous to, or on the day that they were married. They were to return their deaconess pins, dispose of their uniforms, and refrain from identifying themselves as deaconesses. The procedure was called “disjoining.”

Created years earlier when Deaconess Orders had been modeled on the organizational principles of European sisterhoods, and included communal living arrangements, the disjoining rule proved incredibly difficult to displace, even though society was changing and deaconesses in the new United Church had more independence and were expected to provide for themselves and to live in the community. The rule remained a part of the Manual and Constitution of the Deaconess Order until the late 1950’s, although its immediate effect on women was softened in 1953 when the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers, the successor to the original Inter-Board Committee, began to allow individual deaconesses who married to keep their positions and to remain in the Order if both they and their employers wrote letters formally requesting it. Interestingly enough, there was a rigid adherence to the rule when there was an over-supply of clergy after Church Union and during the Depression, and the softening of the rule occurred at a time when women workers were scarce and in high demand.

When ordination became a possibility for women, after the remit authorized by the 1934 General Council passed, the same expectation was applied to ordained women. All were required to resign from their ministry position at the time of their marriage. The persistence of this rule for over twenty-five years, despite several vigorous challenges to it, indicates that the requirement that deaconesses and ordained women relinquish their status and profession when they married was

more than just a part of a more communal and segregated past. It was a result of a more current theology and a societal expectation that women could not combine a role as a wife and a worker at the same time. For all women, marriage was seen as the natural and legitimate primary commitment, and work was seen as something that would inevitably interfere with it. Church teachings as well as cultural practices prescribed that women's nurturing, caretaking capabilities were, first of all, given for family care and maintenance and only secondarily, in cases of spinsterhood and widowhood, could they be applied to wage-earning. Marriage itself was the greatest calling for women, a job of great challenge, and one which, by definition, included economic, social and emotional dependence on a man, and the accompanying role of motherhood. The church's theology and its practices supported this, legitimated and naturalized it by making it appear as God's singular will for women, the primary way in which the world was ordered, and by equating deviance from this role with sin.

Expectations and rules that enforced retirement after marriage were not limited to the professions of deaconesses and ordained women in the early years. They also governed other caretaking professions such as teaching and nursing, though both of these professions won the concession that married women could remain in the profession long before deaconesses and ordained women did.

When vigorously challenged, the rule of "disjoining" was justified by some as the only practical way of dealing with women professionals in the church. The understanding of "call," or service to the Church equated faithfulness in professional church work with a willingness to be sent anywhere in the country. While this was practical for male ordained ministers primarily because their wives were socialized and rewarded for accompanying them without question, it would not have been possible for married deaconesses and ordained women to present themselves as equally available and therefore "faithful" servants in a society and church in which it was unheard of for a husband to relocate himself for the job situation of his wife. Thus, in practical terms, married deaconesses and ordained women could not be accommodated either within the current theology or practices concerning paid work in the church.

The Removal of the Rule

In 1951 work began on revising the Constitution of the Deaconess Order. With it came a lively discussion of the regulation requiring the disjoining of women from the Deaconess Order when they married. Though the decision was made to leave it in the Constitution, this was openly challenged both by individual members of the Order and by Harriet Christie, the Principal of the United Church Training School, on the grounds that it reinforced outdated, rigid rules of women's roles in society and was out of step with what was happening in other areas of women's work. In a letter to the Executive Secretary of the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers, the Principal voiced her concerns:

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

Similar cases were made to change the expectation that ordained women resign from their work when married. But change came slowly, and not without controversy and resistance. In the case of deaconesses, the clause remained in the Constitution. The position of the Committee was softened in 1953, when both individual deaconesses who were to be married and their employing congregations began to write to the Committee requesting that they be allowed to continue in their jobs and remain within the Order. The first of these requests came in February of 1953, and after considerable discussion and continuing resistance by some, the Committee agreed that “since it will be possible for (her) to continue to serve as a deaconess after her marriage, that she be permitted to retain her status in the Deaconess Order as long as she continues to perform the duties of a deaconess.” For the next four years decisions such as the previous one continued to be made around specific individuals and congregations who wrote seeking that the rule be waived. Several requests were also being made during this time period for ordained women to remain in their ministry positions after marriage.

The rule remained in force and acted as a continuing powerful statement of what was expected, the desirable, the norm. The allowing of some exceptions did not really make women’s continued participation in professional church work after marriage any more acceptable. And it still meant that deaconesses who needed to relocate at the time of their marriage continued to have no alternative but to resign. And married deaconesses who later left their position, looked for another appointment, and were unable to find a congregation willing to request a waiving of the rule, continued to have to resign. In 1957, after much more inharmonious debate, the disjoining rule was finally removed from the Constitution of the Deaconess Order and deaconesses’ options concerning the combining of careers and marriage were no longer legislated by the church.

Effects on Deaconesses and Ordained Women Who Married

The “disjoining” rule removed from women the possibility of making choices which combined marriage, family and paid service in the Church. Though some women did not see this as a hardship at the time of their marriage, and did not consciously oppose the rule, it nevertheless kept them out of the workforce for long periods of time, removed them from their spiritual and professional community, and made it difficult for them to return to professional work in the church. If the economic circumstances of widowhood or divorce required them to resume paid employment, they frequently found themselves treated as first-time applicants to the Deaconess Order or to Ordained Ministry, and, when finally readmitted, often received no recognition for past accomplishments or experience.

Effects on Deaconesses and Ordained Women Who Did Not Marry

The result of the disjoining rule was a constant decrease in the numbers in the Deaconess Order and in the numbers of ordained women. This reinforced an over-all impression that church work for women was not long-term, not seriously a vocation, and second in importance to the male ordained profession.

For deaconesses in particular, the results were dramatic. Requests to address the pressing issues of workload and inadequate remuneration of deaconesses were easily brushed aside or seen to be low in priority. The disjoining rule served to confirm the belief that deaconess work was not a career or a long-term occupation in women’s lives. It was argued that in the short term, poor working conditions and salaries were not a serious problem because marriage, the real vocation, was not far ahead for most women. The lack of adequate pensions for deaconesses was not taken seriously because the assumption again was that most women would marry and would have husbands to provide for their futures. Deaconess work became seen by many as some kind of preparation period for real life (that is, marriage), and the women who were deaconesses were perceived as a group of young, immature workers, less experienced than their ordained colleagues, and less serious about their work. Notions like this prevented any comparisons of salaries or working conditions with male professional workers, and kept sexism hidden in the church.

The reality was that almost half of the deaconesses at any given period in the church’s life did not marry and ended up spending their entire lives in Church work. Many times they worked for an ordained man who was much younger and less experienced, yet found themselves under his supervision. Questions of exploitation and inferior treatment were never raised because “everyone” knew that deaconess work was temporary and the realm of young women waiting to be married. For example, the following, produced in 1848 stated: “It will be noticed that on the lists (of workers needed) a larger number of women are called for than men. This is natural, as the replacements are inevitably more frequent. Marriage and other types of home responsibility tend to make the average length of service of women shorter than that of men.”

Many deaconesses lived at below poverty levels and, once retired, received pensions that were seriously inadequate. In 1934, for example, there were 35 retired Methodist deaconesses whose pensions, it was admitted publicly, did not provide even basic living expenses. By 1940 the situation was so serious that two special appeals were launched to secure donations to increase their pensions.

Benefits of the “Disjoining Rule” for the Church

There were several ways that the disjoining rule benefited the church. Most deaconesses and ordained women who married ended up becoming involved in volunteer work in the congregations which they joined. They were actively encouraged to accept major leadership positions, particularly in Christian Education programmes and women’s groups. They were, in fact using their educational skills and professional experience in a way which congregations benefited from yet paid nothing for. In this way, church work differed from other professions in which women had to resign upon marriage. Nowhere else were the lines between volunteerism and professionalism so blurred and the pressure to work for nothing as strong as in the church. The publicity of the deaconess Training School showed both the blurring between women’s volunteer and professional work in the church, and the power of the “disjoining” rule. “Many workers marry and serve their communities voluntarily with an effectiveness made possible by their special training. It is important, however, that one consider church work worthy of lifetime service before choosing it as a vocation.”

Current actions

In this historical context, the 38th General Council received the following petition from Hamilton Conference:

*“Whereas the policy of The United Church Of Canada formerly mandated that deaconesses and ordained women clergy relinquish their rights to practice ministry if and when they married: and
Whereas we now hear and acknowledge the pain of these stories and the denial of gifts in the cases of these women; and
Whereas our evolving consciousness as a church has recognized the injustice of former policies in relation to other groups, such as Native peoples and Japanese Canadians and have issued formal apologies; and
Whereas we as a church have historically committed ourselves to the goals of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in solidarity with Women, and The Decade to Overcome Violence and have sought through our creed to “seek justice and resist evil,” even the evil of sexism,
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the General Council find a way on our behalf to formally apologize to these women and express our sorrow for the loss of their leadership to the church.*

The General Council received the petition and took the following action:

“Having heard this petition, therefore be it resolved that the 38th General Council find a way, on our behalf, to express our sincere regret to these women and express our sorrow for the loss of their leadership to the church.”

In response to the General Council action, the fall meeting of the General Council Executive (October 28-31, 2005) will be asked to adopt the following proposal:

It is proposed that:

The General Council Executive receive and approve the document "A service of Apology to United Church women affected by the disjoining rule."

Enact the service of Apology at its April 2006 meeting;

Request that Conferences seek to identify women affected by the disjoining rule within their bounds; and

Enact the Service of Apology at some time within the next year and, as far as possible, invite and enable the women who have been affected to be present at the service;

Forward the names of all women so identified to the General Council Office;

Authorize the Moderator to write to all women so identified indicating the General Council's sincere regret over the policy and its implications.

Coming 'Round to Ourselves

Texts: 2 Kings 22:14-20, Psalm 5Matthew 26:6-13

April 30, 2006 – General Council Executive

“A SERVICE OF APOLOGY TO WOMEN IN MINISTRY AFFECTED BY THE DISJOINING RULE”

ELIZABETH EBERHART-MOFFAT

----- pouring of water into the bowl-----

*We remember water ...
Over which the spirit moved at Creation;
Which upheld an ark, as the sacred story bears witness,
delivering its saving remnant to safe harbour;
Water that parted to save a fleeing people from injustice;
Water that sprang from a rock to renew and refresh
a thirsty people in the wilderness;
Water that flushed our infant lives into the world;
Water in which our mothers and our fathers bathed us
when we could not look after ourselves;
Water in which we were baptized
and which marks our membership in the company
of the faithful ...*

*May this same water, be among us today in this sacred time and place,
bringing new life and new commitment to this blessed community.
For we believe in God who has created and IS creating;
Who has come in Jesus the Word made Flesh to reconcile and make new;
And who works in us AND in others by the Spirit.
Thanks be to God.*

I have just included you in a ritual and shared with you a bowl that I've used many times over my thirty two years in ministry in this United Church of ours.

Through the wave of feminism and special women's decades that have marked this time, like the World Council of Churches "Decade to end Violence" in which we are now engaged, this bowl has been present celebrating women's community with arms linked around the edge of an ancient receptacle, a womb of creative endeavor, a holding place, a shared place, a receptacle of the Spirit.

It speaks of cooperative endeavors and deep mutual caring. It is reminiscent to me of women down through the ages who have gathered 'round in circles, mending nets, creating quilts, sharing the hopes and cares of their families, delivering life, and holding their communities together before God.

It recalls the silent cloud of witnesses, whose members rarely get mentioned in scripture, .. women like the prophet Huldah, who understood the injustice of King Josiah and delivered truth to power .. or Tabitha, God's faithful servant in Joppa, who was raised from death by Peter and the grateful 'prayers' of all the believers

who cherished her ministry among them .. or the faithful one who bathed Jesus for burial in a precious ointment.

It acknowledges 'Wisdom', part of the logos tradition, named in scripture as "Sophia", *Wisest One, Radiant One (VU#893)*, who was present as architect at Creation, and who with God formed humanity in their image, male and female.

This bowl has been a focal point at many women's studies, retreats and gender justice events, amidst women whose stories it still holds, .. women who have shared their faith together, .. women who have nurtured and encouraged each other's gifts and who have empowered one another to answer God's call to ministry in the church and in the world.

It holds the story of its' designer and maker, an artist named Sarai Marais, raised in Holland amidst a strict Christian community. Her "artist's way" of engaging in the faith was too unorthodox to be appreciated or celebrated by her people. Coming to Canada was Sarai's way of dealing with experience that felt to her like "ex-communication" from her church. Yet United Church women, who saw her creations and recognized their spiritual nature, kept flocking to her former gallery in Elora, with expressions of appreciation for the witness of her work. How wonderful it was to affirm Sarai's gifts in a formal way back in 1993, when we used her creations as the "centerpiece" of a Hamilton Conference retreat we called "Walk Sister, Walk", held at Five Oaks Lay Training Centre to celebrate the mid-point of the World Council of Churches "Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women". Today we are engaged in a similar event of turning and affirmation. Like the circle of the bowl, we are finally coming 'round to ourselves and to each other.

As we enjoy the presence of this bowl and its water this morning amidst our worship, let it stand for all the women, who were asked to officially disjoin themselves from the ministries to which they had been called, commissioned and ordained:

- women who were left unemployed, in poverty, and shut out from the courts of the church;
- women who were limited by a cultural belief that they could not combine a role as a wife and a worker at the same time;
- women held hostage by an ethic that put marriage and child bearing ahead of God's call to service and made them mutually exclusive;
- women who became victims of a policy of discrimination that was conveniently used whenever there was an over-supply of clergy after Church Union or during the Depression;
- women silenced by a policy that continued to be implemented because of a 'call system' that, in the words of Mary Anne MacFarlane(in her background research for the events of this day,) "equated faithfulness in professional church work with a willingness to be sent anywhere in the country". In a time when a husband would rarely consider relocating

himself in favour of a job location for his wife, this system of “call” continued as a vanguard for the attitudes and norms of patriarchy so comfortably at home in our church.

Not until 1957, long after this policy had been disbanded in the fields of nursing and teaching, and after decades of significant challenge and countless debates, was this ecclesiastical policy of disjoining finally removed. At that time, I was 12 years of age and being raised in a family which was clearly giving me the message that I could be anything in the world to which I aspired, as long as I was prepared to do the work and the training. Such a disconnect between the nurturing and calling of our families and our God, and the systems that run the world we seek to serve!

Three years ago, at an annual meeting of Hamilton Conference, Callie Archer, an active leader in the work of our Conference against ‘Racism’, found her way to my table on the floor of the meeting. She had been deeply moved by a friend and the injustice of her story of disjoining as a deaconess in our church. Not being an official delegate to Conference that year, Callie was looking for someone who could help to draft a petition that addressed this issue and present it to the court. I became that person for Callie and former missionary, Betty Bridgeman, seconded our motion. It is the same petition that finally made it to the 38th General Council in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, and has now brought us to this point.

It is great to have Callie here today and to be able to thank her publicly for the inspiration that ignited this petition. I am also grateful to her for the opportunity she made available to me on Friday to meet 85 year old Joan MacDonald, former United Church diaconal minister, in a telephone interview from the home she now shares with her youngest daughter in Haliburton. It was so very special for me.

As Joan’s story is now a part of the history of this bowl and representative of so many similar stories being held before us in this service, I would like to share with you some of Joan’s experience of what she and others referred to as becoming “defrocked deaconesses”.

Joan came to Canada from Manchester, England in 1927 with her mother and an older sibling, .. after they had been deserted by a father who was deeply scared emotionally from his experiences in the first World War. As you can imagine, this struggling family knew the conditions of poverty up close. Yet during an emergency situation at CGIT camp, then National Secretary of CGIT, Muriel Jacobson recognized the leadership skills of young Joan that came to the fore. Hoping to affirm in her “the girl that God would have her be”, Muriel asked Joan what she planned to do with her life. “Big Jake”, was the name the CGIT girls had for Muriel Jacobson, truly another prophet at work among our people in the history of our church.

Muriel made it possible for Joan to leave her current work for the YWCA with street children and to come to Toronto to complete her Grade 13 at Jarvis Collegiate. Muriel assured Joan that she would always have food, a place to stay and \$100 to cover her immediate needs .. a \$100 that she could eventually pass on to others when she was secure .. a kind of “pay it forward” scheme of another era. Joan studied hard while working at the switchboard at the Y.

Then in 1945 Joan entered the United Church Training School. Its then president, Gertrude Rutherford, said, “Joan, you need to go to University”, a luxury that Joan had not felt possible in her ongoing efforts to help support her mother and sister. Once again assured by a female prophet that “we’ll find a way,” Joan entered Victoria College. Gertrude had spoken with Dr. Woodside, the registrar at Vic, who told Joan that she would have a bursary for a year to help get her started and that if she could stay all three years as long as she maintained a ‘B’ average.

Joan had to have a job while studying. So, during this time, she worked as an assistant deaconess with Ruby Brown and Peter Bryce at Metropolitan United Church. Joan started a teenage group for young people who became her friends. Recognizing her gifts, Ernie Howse, minister at Metropolitan, asked Joan to come with him when he moved to Bloor Street United, to work there as his secretary and to be given the freedom to develop whatever programmes she wished.

Joan worked at Bloor Street United Church for five wonderful years. She began by knocking on doors in the neighbourhood to determine needs among the many new Canadians there and soon found that people were asking for a good nursery school. The programme Joan developed and implemented was still going at Bloor Street, the last time Joan checked. This was just part of a bigger programme that Joan began at Bloor Street for new Canadians and their families that included “English as a second language”, special neighbourhood Christmas dinners, and so many other initiatives that made real the ‘kingdom’ of God in that time and place.

“I never would have made it had people not helped me,” Joan testified and went on to name her saints like Jean Hutchinson and Harriet Christie, who supported her in the manner of One who said, “I will make you friends.”

During that time a young couple came to Bloor Street who became friends with Joan. “Can you help my husband, Dick, get more involved in the church,” asked Katherine, who was becoming a fast friend of Joan’s. Bloor Street needed a boys’ worker at the time and at this work with some direction by Joan. Katherine was tragically killed in an accident in 1953, and in time Joan and Dick’s working relationship took on the new dimensions of marriage.

In the words of Tina Campion, in charge of deaconesses at the time, Joan was told “You can no longer work for the church anymore.” And though for the immediate time, Joan was taken up with the responsibilities of helping to raise Katherine and Dick’s two children in addition to birthing children of their own, Joan was determined to eventually return to her official church work, and like many others .. refused to relinquish her pin.

As we know from our history, or in this case, our ‘herstory’ ... Joan was never able to return to her professional work for the church. Instead, she became a teacher, an active lay woman for forty years at Appleby United Church, and an ongoing social activist working with refugees, prisoners, heading up a study on poverty in Burlington that led to additional programmes like a second food bank with a number of churches in the city’s east end and an Interfaith Development Education Association, known as “IDEA”, which has continued to work hard for the past 20 years on the issues of poverty in that district. It was here, as Callie Archer was getting involved in her community, that she became so aware of Joan’s legacy of social activism. “Oh, you can help take over from Joan,” was a comment that Callie heard on more than one occasion.

Joan told me that from the perspective she has in these ‘latter days’ she recognizes that two of the most wonderful gifts that have held her in good stead, came from her mother. As a young child being tucked into bed at night, Joan’s mother used to say ‘remember this’: “God is Spirit and God is Love. That’s all you really need to know.” The other gift came when she was sharing an early report card with her mother. Her sister had as usual come home with a perfect report. But Joan was having a harder go at school. After expressing joy at her sister’s accomplishments, Joan’s mother turned to her and asked if she thought she had done her best. “Yes, mother,” Joan replied, “I tried my hardest.” “Then it’s a wonderful report,” her mother exclaimed with a hug and a kiss!

In the great scheme of God’s reconciling love, we know that the work and witness of Joan MacDonald and so many like her have not been lost. “Nothing is lost in truth,” my own amazing mother used to proclaim with assurance. Today, as a church we are recognizing this on behalf of so many disjoined women who moved on in the church or out of the church during the course of their active lives. But there was another thing that I remember my mother saying on the rare occasions when her wisdom and insight proved insufficient to see beyond the restrictive limits of culture and norm. “I stand corrected,” she would say with conviction when the winds of the Spirit showed her another way or a greater truth.

This United Church of ours has had on a number of significant occasions come to this same juncture of consciousness, when we recognize our complicity with or our promotion of the cultural norms that have so unjustly dismissed the precious talents and gifts of the human family and denied individuals and groups the right to become “the people God intended them to be”. These are the times we have had to say with courage, “we stand corrected” in relation to Japanese Canadians,

to Dr, James Endicott, to our native people, to the people of faith in the Jewish community, and now to sisters in ministry.

But lest we become known only as the church of the next apology, let us also remind ourselves of the temptations of a cheap grace, which reveals in drama and false pride, much like Anne of Green Gables did with her apology to Diana's mother, after unwittingly getting her friend drunk on Marilla's raspberry cordial.

Years ago, Lois Wilson told Joan MacDonald that she should press us for an apology. Three years ago Callie Archer felt the urge to initiate just such an action, and was able to convince me of the same need to act. Today in this Executive context of General Council, we are inaugurating a service of apology which will get repeated at Conference annual meetings this year in various forms across the breadth of this great church. "This acknowledgement must get into the books of the church," Joan told me on Friday morning, "but then we must get on with it. There are so many more important things to accomplish."

Joan speaks for all the ministers and ministries both named and unnamed that this bowl and this water represent, women who understand the need of the church to be corrected, yet whose wisdom, vision and energy continue to issue in deeds of kindness, discernment, encouragement, reconciliation, practical help, teaching, healing, challenging, naming, proclaiming, speaking truth to power, and raising up new life from death.

In a moment, I will pass the bowl among you so that you may add your stone to its waters and symbolically hold the women and the ministries that have inspired you, women and ministries God has called and honoured, even in the absence of our official endorsement and support.

But let us not end with this symbolic act. After we have made our apologies and said our prayers, let us take the 20/20 vision of our reflection, our analysis and our hindsight .. and with open eyes and hearts return to the present and together face the future. Let us continue to be both as wise as serpents and gentle as doves as we lead this church, and this church leads others into the dangerous ministries of our world where Christ is present. And as we go, may we give thanks for the brave women who have led us and still go before us.

Amen.

RESPONSE TO THE UNITED CHURCH'S APOLOGY AND APPRECIATION TO WOMEN
IN MINISTRY AFFECTED BY THE DISJOINING RULE
APRIL 30, 2006 GENERAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE

I am astonished to witness this event! Thank you for the invitation to respond. On behalf of nobody in particular, because who is authorized to speak for all these Disjoined women, I thank you for this apology and appreciation to the women in ministry affected by the Disjoining rule. The desire to address old wounds and injustices is much appreciated. This worship has been deeply moving. Words have power, words can heal, words can illuminate. Thank you for good words.

In the last week, as I reflected on today's event, I experienced a kaleidoscope of emotions. My initial indifference - after all it was a long time ago and life has travelled on - began to evaporate as memories returned. I remembered the grief, the anger. All of my friends have had very bitter experiences in the church. About 25 years ago the deaconesses were gathered for some decision making at Cedar Glen. What astonished and distressed many was the out pouring of pain, the feelings of rejection and marginalization. Many professional women returned to earlier careers. Most gave countless hours of quality leadership for free.

The Disjoining was really the tip of the iceberg. In the local church and in the courts while it was nice to be a woman in ministry, it was nicer to be a man. In 1960, after my first induction, the minister announced the hymn "Turn Back O Man Forswear Thy Foolish Ways". He may have had a point.

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

It is not hard to look back 50 years and see injustices. The question is what are we doing today, that is unfair, prejudicial, insensitive, unloving. Women ministers in the United Church are now well accepted, unless they happen to be from a visible minority. 50 years ago we were still sending missionaries to Korea, now they are sending us ministers. How gracefully do we receive them into our typical congregation? Could we not do more to prepare congregations and ministers for each other?

In conclusion, besides the indifference, grief, and anger, I have also experienced affirmation. As I have recalled the work done by my class mates in Africa, Hong Kong, Japan, India, the Caribbean, and Canada, I am proud to be part of this ministry. As I reflect on the contribution to our Church made by those who received no remuneration, I give thanks for their sacrifice and devotion. I remember with gratitude the leadership of Harriet Christie, Jean Hutchinson, and Katherine Hockin. I have been blessed to be in such a company.

It would not be appropriate for me to accept this Apology from the Church, as I cannot speak for others. However, I will say that I forgave the United Church this Disjoining many years ago. The fact that I have a loving and supporting husband and terrific children makes this much easier. Also I have been fortunate in finding rewarding work in the Church. Over the years Christ has been much more faithful to me than I have been to him. In times of distress, I simply remember that Jesus had much more trouble than this with the religious establishment!

May Christ's Spirit lead us all in the way of justice and compassion.

Wilma M. Cade

A further observation I have made about women in ministry is that yes, a woman can do well in the United Church if she is very intelligent, hard working, attractive, and charming. If she does not possess all these virtues she may not be so successful. The fact that a few women shine does not mean that we now have a level playing field..