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July 20, 2009

Joan Sandy  
206-930 Heritage View  
Saskatoon SK S7H 5S6

Dear Joan,

On behalf of the United Church of Canada I write to extend to you a sincere apology for the action of the Church that removed you from ministry, just because you married.

It grieves me to know that you hold the distinction of being the last woman to be disjoined because you married. It is painful to know that this happened eight years after the rule had been officially ended. I am grateful that despite the way you were treated you continued to offer skilled leadership to the church.

In April 2006, the Executive of the General Council publicly apologized for the disjoining through a service of worship. Wilma (Unwin) Cade, Marion (Woods) Kirkwood, Ruth (Sandilands) Lang and Joan (Cheesman) Willis, were in attendance to receive the apology. Some children and grandchildren of other disjoined women were in the congregation. It was a time of reflection on the affects that church policies, in particular the disjoining policy had on deaconesses and ordained women in the church.

Elizabeth Ebehart Moffatt was one of the people who initiated the petition calling for the apology. She was the preacher at the service. She shared these words:

'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. 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.

As a church we are trying to stand corrected, to acknowledge that the actions of the past continue to affect us today.

The service of apology contained the following litany:

*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.*

*The Mission and Service Fund — supporting United Church work in Canada and around the world  
Le fonds "Mission et Service" soutient le travail de l'Église Unie au Canada et à travers le monde*

*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.*

*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.*

During the service a bowl was passed from hand to hand as people placed a stone in it to remember the women affected. We recalled the losses disjoining brought for women like you, and for the whole church. That bowl sits in my office and it is a daily reminder of you and your sisters.

I want to express the apologies of the church that policies were in place for far too long that restricted the ways in which your gifts could be acknowledged and shared. The stones also remind me of the many, many gifts that you have offered to the church, and I want to thank you for sharing those gifts. Through seeking reinstatement as a diaconal minister you provided a model of justice seeking for others. The stories of the faithful ministries of women affected by disjoining have helped us to remember that the limitations of the church did not limit the work of the gospel.

I offer this letter in humility knowing that words are never enough. Yet it is by word that God's love and grace are known in Jesus Christ. I pray that the words of the Church have been true and faithful and that you will receive them in the spirit of deep appreciation in which they are offered.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Giuliano', written in a cursive style.

David Giuliano (The Right Reverend)  
Moderator

Encl. Response to Apology by Wilma Cade