

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..