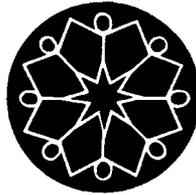


Celebrating The Memories

Selected Stories about
Women and the
United Church of Christ
1957–2007



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The Living Theological Heritage
of the United Church of Christ

Note: This booklet blends articles published during 2006-2007 on the Women's Page of the Worship and Education Ministry Team, Local Church Ministries. The original essays (with pictures) can be viewed at REMEMBERING HER <http://www.ucc.org/women/remembering.htm>



Before the birth of the United Church of Christ in 1957, women in those denominations that came together to create the UCC generally related to their churches in five ways: (1) through special ministries of service as Deaconesses; (2) through local congregational groups that studied and supported mission; (3) through “ladies aid societies” that raised money for church projects; (4) through “altar guilds” that handled preparations for worship; and (5) through small prayer and study groups. In many local churches the last four of these functions often found expression in a “women’s group, guild, association or fellowship.”

By the 1950s many local Congregational Christian (CC) women were part of “Women’s Fellowships.” Building on the special history of the four historic Congregational Woman’s Boards of Missions that had been established in the 1860s and 1870s, CC women met regularly to do many of the above things. Local women’s fellowships related to their State Conference fellowships and to the national Women’s Fellowship of the Congregational Christian Churches.

Women’s organizations in the Evangelical and Reformed (E&R) Church began in 1869 with formation of the Women’s Missionary Society of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in the US. Much later, in 1921, the Evangelical Synod of North America organized the Evangelical Women’s Union. After 1934 the Women’s Guild of the E&R Church provided national support for hundreds of local Women’s Guilds.

In the 1940s and 1950s denominational support for men and women in the Congregational Christian Churches was provided by a national Laymen’s Fellowship and a National Women’s Fellowship; in the Evangelical and Reformed Church there was a national Churchmen’s Brotherhood and Women’s



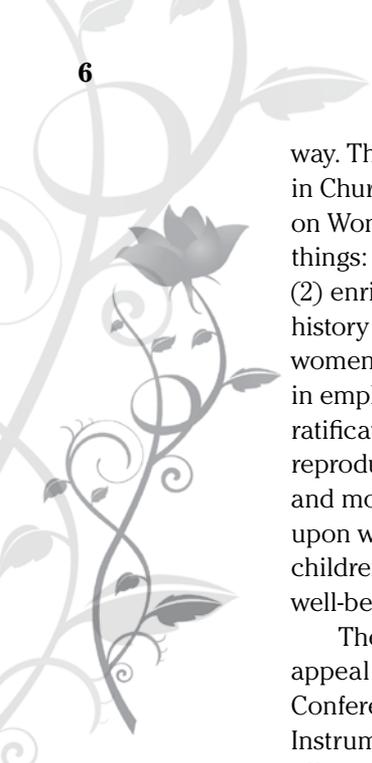
Guild. Everyone assumed that when the United Church of Christ was created these CC and E&R organizations would merge to create two new national UCC bodies, one for men and one for women.

The Council for Lay Life and Work (CLLW)

By the 1960s that assumption changed. Building upon experiences in “lay acquaintance meetings,” “lay schools of theology,” and conferences on the “place of the laity in the church,” the UCC Constitution, completed in 1961, called for a single national instrumentality to support all UCC laity (men and women) – a Council for Lay Life and Work (CLLW). Its advocates affirmed the wholeness of the Church, recognizing that changing social patterns were reshaping the lives of men and women. They declared that the purpose of the CLLW was “to assist all men and women in the churches to grow to full stature as mature Christians; to develop and coordinate programs to deepen and strengthen their Christian witness; and to help men and women understand and participate in the whole task of the church.”

In 1962 the national president of the Evangelical and Reformed Women’s Guild and the national president of the Congregational Christian Women’s Fellowship declared an interim year and prepared to “close down” their organizations. They wrote a joint letter to thousands of local women’s groups “to help them follow new patterns, learn to use new terminology, and look forward to new opportunities.” The letter did not suggest that local women’s guilds and fellowships should go out of existence; instead it challenged local groups to relate to wider church structures in new ways. It stated, “we are standing on the threshold of an exciting new adventure, on the growing edge of the ‘church of tomorrow’.”

The new executive of the Council for Lay Life and work was Helen Huntington Smith. Born in China,



way. The General Synod “Pronouncement on Women in Church and Society” (1971) established a Task Force on Women in Church and Society charged to do nine things: (1) expand opportunities for women in leadership, (2) enrich knowledge about women’s contributions in history and society, (3) develop programs to support women’s rights, (4) work to overcome discrimination in employment and compensation, (5) promote the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, (6) support reproductive choice, (7) commend other organizations and movements seeking to correct injustices inflicted upon women, (8) affirm gender neutral life styles for children and (9) explore additional areas relevant to the well-being of women. [1971 *GS Minutes*, pp.129-30]

The 1971 Pronouncement was a broad based appeal to church members, local congregations, Conferences, national Boards and Offices (called Instrumentalities) to become more assertive in their efforts to improve the lives of contemporary women. During its four year life (1971-75), the Task Force focused upon promoting Conference Task Forces, improving women’s employment situation, supporting families and challenging masculine patterns of theological education.

Common Lot

One of the most significant actions of the Task Force was the launching of a new newsletter/publication (January 1974) to advocate for and communicate with women about the changing needs of women in church and society. The first issue of this newsletter, called *The Common Lot*, was a non-descript eight pages of news and articles in brown ink on beige paper. There were no pictures – only a graphic design showing a circle of stick figures joined together in a circle.

Common Lot quickly became a valuable resource, sought after and used by UCC women in thousands of

local congregations. Thirty three years later *Common Lot* looks quite different. Its Winter, 2007 (#109) issue is a 24 page glossy magazine filled with articles for and about women with striking art and photos. Although finances have sometimes limited the frequency of its publication, *Common Lot* remains highly respected and important. Its annual issue containing resources for “Women’s Week” is eagerly anticipated in many local congregations.

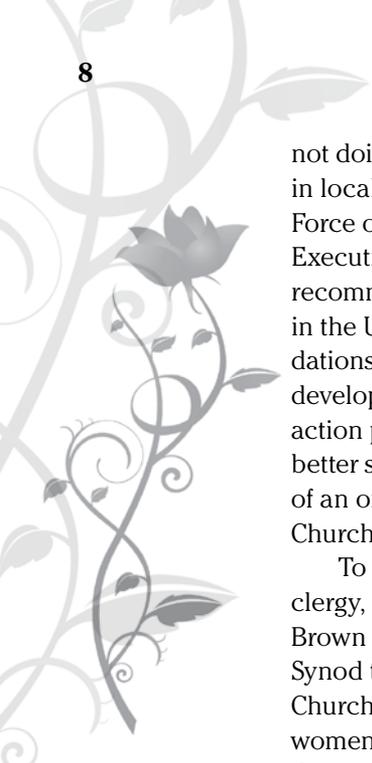
At its beginning *Common Lot* set forth three goals: (1) to acknowledge that Christian people are part of a “confessing community and in need of forgiveness, liberation and grace,” and that in our “common lot” none of us are without blame; (2) to share stories within the context of the women’s movement; and (3) to create a greater sense of struggle and solidarity among women, among men, and between the sexes, races and age groups within the church.

The first page in the first newsletter explained:

“Not all of us in this struggle use the same language or share the same cultural, religious or historical perspectives. Not all of us agree in our analysis, use the same methods to achieve our goals, nor do we yet share a common vision of what a just society would look like. Yet as the society and its conflicts increasingly demand that the church be the Church in the true prophetic and pastoral sense, our goal to participate in the struggle of women and “minorities” to obtain justice becomes sharper. And as our goals become more clearly focused, they also become more closely parallel.” [*The Common Lot*, January 1974, #1, p.1]

The Task Force on Women in Church and Society

Throughout the 1970s some people thought the UCC was becoming too “feminist,” while others argued that it was



not doing enough to support historic women's groups in local congregations. In its 1975 Report, the Task Force on Women in Church and Society challenged the Executive Council to become a catalyst, monitoring recommendations "related to the elimination of sexism" in the UCC by implementing ten specific recommendations. Among those recommendations were the development of improved personnel and affirmative-action policies, new sensitivity to the role of volunteers, better support for women clergy and the establishment of an ongoing Advisory Commission on Women in Church and Society.

To lift up a new UCC commitment to support women clergy, in 1975 the Task Force established the Antoinette Brown Awards. These awards are given at every General Synod to honor two ordained women in the United Church of Christ who exemplify "the contributions women make through ordained ministry as they work in the parish or in church related institutions." The award is named to remember and celebrate the ministry of Antoinette Brown, commonly recognized as the first woman ordained by a major Protestant denomination in the United States – an event that took place in 1853 in a small Congregational Church in South Butler, New York.

The 1975 Synod was a special synod for women. Its moderator, Margaret Haywood, a judge from Washington, DC, was extremely effective. UCC President Robert Moss promised that there would be no foot-dragging in carrying out the votes of Synod to support women and serve the needs of women. A spontaneous and exuberant Synod erupted in applause and thanksgiving after the recommendations were approved. According to *A.D. Magazine*, "Women "put it all together" and they did it with "determination, patience, cooperation and care."

Meeting the needs of all women throughout the United Church of Christ, however, was an ongoing challenge. Although national women's organizations had been phased out and new "task forces" organized in many conferences, life in local congregational

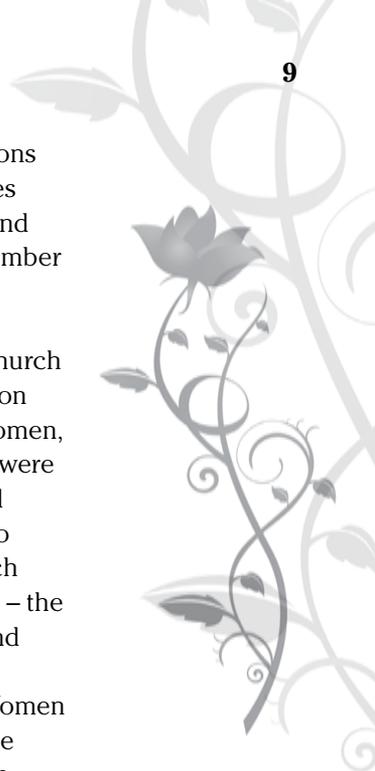
women's fellowships, circles, guilds and associations was troubled. Some groups adjusted meeting times to accommodate working women. They studied and explored feminist issues. Overall, however, the number of younger women involved in church women's organizations steadily declined.

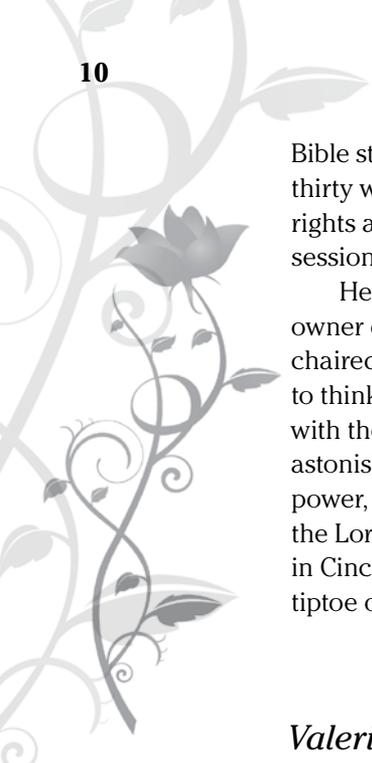
The national UCC Task Force on Women in Church and Society and its successor Advisory Commission tried many things to meet the needs of all UCC women, yet it was difficult to keep everyone happy. There were women who wanted to restore the earlier national women's structures. There were other women who felt those were passé and agitated for wider church attention to social justice issues related to women – the Equal Rights Amendment, reproductive choice and feminist theology.

From 1975-79 the Advisory Commission for Women in Church and Society listened carefully and in the late 1970s, along with the UCC Office for Church in Society, and funds from the 1978 Family Thank Offering, organized the "First National Meeting of UCC Women for Leadership Development".

The First National Meeting of UCC Women for Leadership Development

The meeting took place January 10-13, 1979 in Cincinnati, Ohio. Under the theme "*Created in God's Image – Women Empowered for Mission*" it registered 1,240 people (17% Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, Black and Hispanic; 4% male, 2.5% seminary students). Hundreds of women came, affirming in an opening litany their desire to learn, to teach each other, to worship, to sing in joy, to grow and stretch, to experience power, to share stories and skills, to strengthen leadership in God's church and to renew their "commitment to struggle for the coming of justice throughout the world." They were nourished by daily





Bible study, seven major speeches, one hundred and thirty workshops on management, theology, human rights and personal growth, and dozens of small group sessions and informal conversations.

Helen Barnhill, an African American executive and owner of a management consulting firm in Milwaukee, chaired the event. She reminded women at the meeting to think like Mary when the angel appeared to her with the surprising news of her pregnancy. Mary was astonished, yet she began to sing a song of joy and power, newly confident that her soul could “magnify the Lord.” In the same way, Barnhill told the women in Cincinnati that they needed to be like Mary, “on the tiptoe of expectation.”

Valerie Russell

Expectations among UCC women were diverse and challenged by ethnic and racial realities. Fortunately, in 1973, two years after the UCC General Synod established the Task Force on Women in Church and Society, an African American woman named Valerie Russell became the assistant to the president of the UCC and coordinator of new efforts within the denomination to respond to the changing roles of women. As traditional women’s fellowships and guilds continued to serve the needs of older church women, younger women, lay and ordained, pressed for new resources and structures. Russell understood, yet as a black woman and as a layperson, she worked to make sure that marginal voices were heard in church and society. She recognized that many minority sisters carried “bitter” feelings about white standards of beauty and spent years doing white women’s housework and childcare. She promoted the importance of renewing trust between minority women and white women in the UCC. Her leadership and consistent concern for

the interplay between racism and sexism stretched the awareness and horizons of all UCC women.

Valerie Russell was one of the “saints” of the United Church of Christ. Born in Massachusetts to a family that did not expect her to go to college, she did the unexpected – earning a college degree, doing graduate study and receiving an honorary degree. She valued education, but she also understood why uneducated minority women in the 1970s were skeptical about the enthusiasm of educated white women for the so-called “women’s liberation movement.”

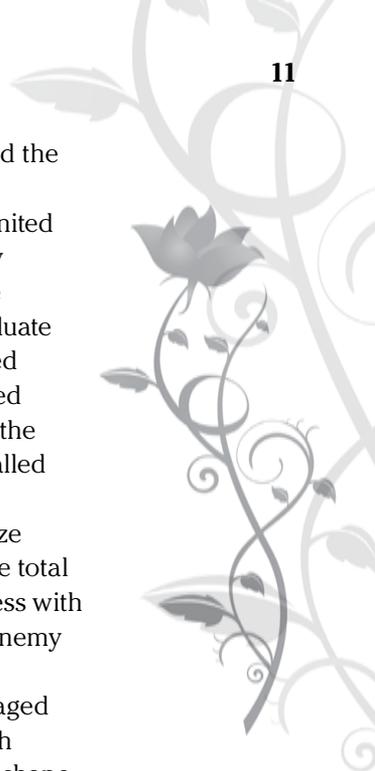
“White women,” she wrote in 1979, “must realize that minority women are intrinsically bound to the total struggle of a race.” When society equates manliness with success and minority males cannot make it, the enemy is not men, it’s the “white establishment.”

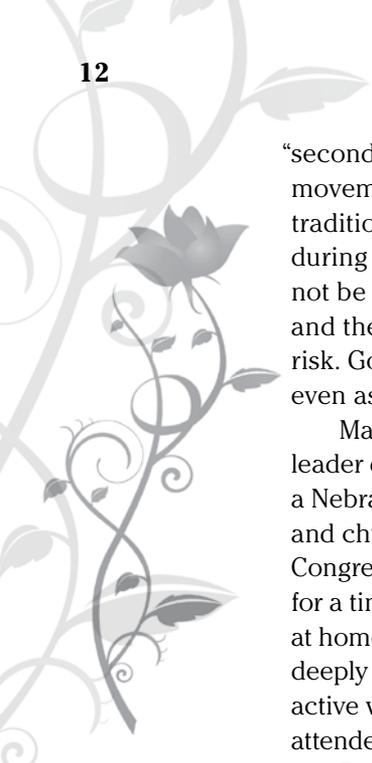
Battles for justice, she declared, cannot be waged by women alone. Minority women must stand with their men, not to perpetuate chauvinism, but to reshape social priorities. Even while she called white men and women to affirm justice for all in the midst of diversity, she insisted that minority men and women needed to develop more supportive and liberating relationships among themselves.

Valerie Russell came of age during the heat of the civil rights movement. After her service in the UCC president’s office, she worked with urban issues in New York and as executive of the City Mission Society of Boston. From 1991-97 she returned to leadership in the UCC as executive director of the Office for Church and Society (OCIS). Unfortunately her extraordinary ministry ended abruptly with a fatal heart attack in 1997.

Marilyn Breitling

From the 1970s on, however, leadership to empower women emerged when it was needed. The





“second wave of feminism, or the women’s liberation movement,” raised awareness and challenged traditions related to women’s roles. Leadership during such times of change is difficult. Leaders dare not be too radical, because people will not follow, and they cannot be too timid, because change requires risk. Good leadership must be rooted and trustworthy, even as it pushes people to grow.

Marilyn Breitling was another important UCC leader during the 1970s and 80s. Breitling grew up on a Nebraska farm and enjoyed going to Sunday school and church. At age twelve she was confirmed in a local Congregational Church. After college she taught school for a time and then married. During the 1960s, as a stay at home Mom with a military husband, she became deeply involved in her local UCC congregation and active within the Illinois South Conference. In 1973 she attended her first General Synod.

During those years of emerging feminist identity, Marilyn Breitling did not feel the need to abandon the church or her faith. In fact, she was sure that the church was “the best place to explore the meaning of women’s identity, inclusive language, freedom of thought/ expression, and new meanings in the biblical story.”

At the General Synod in 1975 Marilyn Breitling was asked to chair the committee assigned to deal with the report of the Task Force on Women in Church and Society. People were not sure if she was “feminist enough to understand the issues” or “too feminist to be trusted by traditional women and men.” She turned out to be exactly the right person.

Later, after she was offered a staff position with the Office for Church Life and Leadership, she learned that as a “middle-aged housewife” she could “hold her own with colleagues and theological giants and she could bridge the gulf between traditional women and the new breed of feminists.” She knew how to relate to hierarchy and bureaucracy in church, medicine, education and the military.

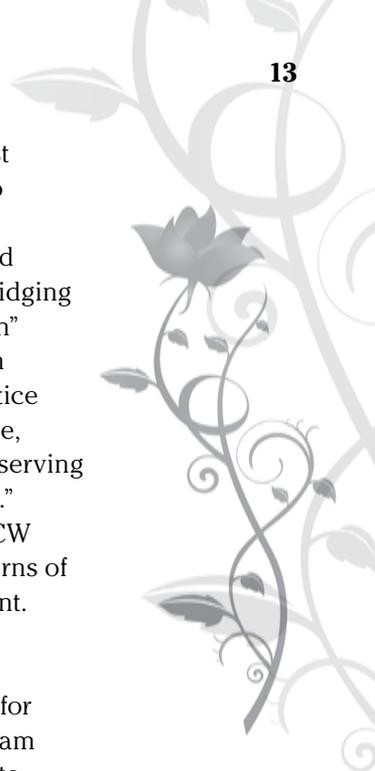
Breitling worked with women to plan the first national meeting for UCC women and to develop the Coordinating Center for Women. In 1979 she became CCW's first executive, a position she held for 12 years. Breitling knew the importance of bridging "the ideological gaps between and among women" on issues like "inclusive language, ending racism and sexism in church and society, economic justice for women, freedom of choice, domestic violence, celebrating diversity, sexual harassment and preserving the past while welcoming the new feminist wave." She was especially proud of the way in which CCW consistently got things done using collegial patterns of decision making that others considered inefficient.

United Church of Christ Women in Mission (UCCWM)

For example, in 1983 the Coordinating Center for Women (CCW) launched a new partnership program aimed to encourage wider church gatherings and to retrieve the historic link between church women and mission. The United Church of Christ Women in Mission (UCCWM), with the letters "CCW" embedded in the acronym, "celebrated the gifts and ministry of all UCC women." It was "committed to providing opportunities for spiritual growth, leadership development and increased participation of women in the total life and mission of the church."

Through UCCWM national women leaders reached out to meet the needs and expectations of continuing women's groups in local congregations, without losing credibility among an emerging generation of feminists and working women. CCW became more aggressive in seeking financial support from local groups and from individuals to strengthen all UCC women.

UCCWM was and continues to be a mixed blessing. Some local and regional "fellowships" and "guilds" consider the commitments of the national church too radical and so they refuse to join UCCWM. Other women jump in with enthusiasm, even adopting the name



“Women in Mission” to describe their local women’s groups.

The United Church of Christ Women in Mission (UCCWM) built and continues to build important bridges – bridges between history and the present, bridges between older and younger women and bridges between the local and national settings of the church. UCC women cross these bridges regularly, affirming that they are one in Christ Jesus and that they share a common lot.

Women’s Inter-Staff Team (WIST)

Another example of collegial decision making was exemplified in the UCC Women’s Inter-Staff Team (WIST). Although it was not until the 1990s that the UCC became more intentional about the importance of mutual covenants and reconfigured the leadership of the denomination around a “collegium of officers,” during the 1970-80s the UCC Women’s Inter-Staff Team (WIST) enabled congregations, associations, conferences, and national instrumentalities to support women more effectively.

The UCC Task Force on Women in Church and Society existed from 1971-75, the Advisory Commission on Women in Church and Society carried on that work from 1975-79, and the first Coordinating Center for Women in Church and Society (CCW) functioned from 1979-87. All of these bodies were considered “non-permanent” agencies established to respond to the changing role and status of women. It was assumed that over time their advocacy would not be needed, and that “as many of the functions as possible” could eventually be transferred to “permanent existing agencies of the church.” To that end, one of the most creative structures created by the national church agencies was the Women’s Inter-Staff Team (WIST) – a multi-phased,

multi-agency effort to “address women’s concerns and eliminate sexism” through a model of inter-agency staff cooperation.

The Women’s Inter-Staff Team (WIST) was formed by Valerie Russell. Initially it brought together women who worked on women’s issues in the President’s Office, the Office for Church Life and Leadership, the Board for Homeland Ministries and the Office for Church in Society. Over the years more agencies appointed women to WIST. Each member was supported by and accountable to her instrumentality, but at the same time encouraged and enabled through WIST to do things collaboratively.

Service on WIST was eagerly sought. WIST women gave each other moral and organizational support. They worked together – relating to Conferences, lobbying with colleagues, attending regional women’s events, and speaking at retreats and conferences. When budgets allowed, WIST members traveled in clusters, listening to and resourcing women’s groups at the grass roots. When communication and collaboration between established and recognized instrumentalities faltered, WIST members reminded national instrumentalities of their common callings and responsibilities. WIST encouraged patterns of cooperation in the system, and pressed for policy statements and actions that served the needs of women.

WIST played a key role in the success of the first national women’s meeting in 1979. WIST raised awareness on issues of domestic violence and sexual harassment. The Advisory Commission, and later the Coordinating Center, used WIST members as “staff.” Women’s Inter-Staff Team members were passionate about strengthening and supporting women of all ages in the church. They modeled the UCC commitment to “collaboration, collegiality, cooperation and covenant.” After 2000 WIST ceased to exist as a formal body, but the United Church of Christ is a stronger church because of the work of the Women’s Inter-Staff Team (WIST).



The Coordinating Center for Women (CCW)

The Coordinating Center for Women (CCW) began in 1979 as a nimble and flexible ad hoc agency, working with little money and formal authority. This was its strength, but it was also its weakness. As long as CCW was not an established instrumentality with constitutional status, women's concerns remained on the edges of decision making and starved for resources. Finally in 1987, over fifteen years after the historic 1971 General Synod Pronouncement on Women in Church and Society, the Coordinating Center for Women (CCW) called for an end to the ad hoc treatment of women in the UCC. It was time, CCW leaders argued, for CCW to become an independent established instrumentality with permanent staff and budget to enable it to address women's issues through advocacy, support, and constituency development.

The CCW 1987 report to General Synod applauded how UCC leaders and members had moved from monitoring the role and status of women in church and society, to empowering women, addressing their concerns, and developing strategies to eliminate sexism in church and society. The report quoted from the biblical story of Jesus and the "bent over woman" in Luke 13:10-13:

"The bent over woman is a haunting and powerful image. She represents all those who are in pain, all who are oppressed and persecuted. The gospel of Luke tells us that through the healing power of Jesus Christ, the bent over woman was able to stand straight and tall. The healing process which straightened her spine is a scripturally symbolic way of expressing the healing and wholeness which we would desire for all of God's daughters and sons. But the bent over woman is more than a generalized symbol of oppression, as powerful as that image

may be. She is also a woman. And she reminds us of the particular call the Church has to address the question of injustices toward women.”

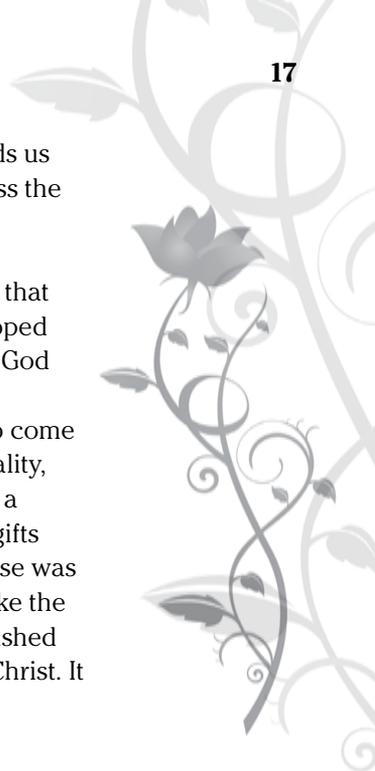
Building on that text, the CCW report insisted that the gifts of women needed to be accepted, developed and nurtured for the benefit of the whole church. God created women and men in God’s own image for equality and partnership. Women and men had to come together to discern new ways of justice and mutuality, thereby empowering the church “to move toward a future where women and men would share their gifts and talents, fully, completely and equally.” The case was made and in 1987 the General Synod voted to make the Coordinating Center for Women (CCW) an established national instrumentality of the United Church of Christ. It was a significant moment.

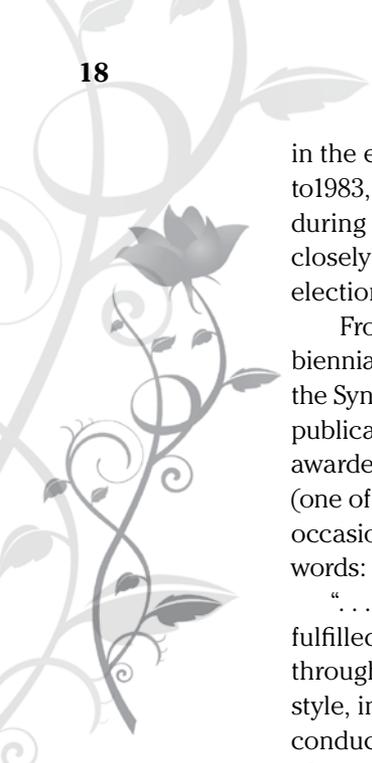
Carol Joyce Brun

Another significant moment in the history of women in the United Church of Christ was in 1983 when Carol Joyce Brun was elected to serve as Secretary of the UCC. She was the first permanent elected female national staff executive in any mainline Protestant denomination in the United States.

Carol Joyce grew up in a parsonage with a realistic love for the church. After earning an undergraduate degree from Central Methodist College in Missouri, she attended Yale Divinity School and graduated from Eden Theological Seminary in 1970. Later she took advanced course work in management and statistics.

Beginning in 1972 Carol Joyce Brun held several administrative positions in the UCC national offices related to leadership, research, and program development. In 1975 she was ordained to a “ministry of administration,” serving as assistant for administration





in the executive offices of the denomination from 1976 to 1983, managing the office of the Secretary of the UCC during Joseph Evans' presidency (1976-77), and working closely with President Avery Post (1977-83) until her own election as Secretary in 1983.

From 1983 to 1991, Carol Joyce Brun coordinated the biennial UCC General Synods, kept the official records of the Synods and the Executive Council, and monitored the publication of the *YEARBOOK of the UCC*. In 1985 she was awarded an honorary degree from Cedar Crest College (one of two UCC related colleges for women). On that occasion the College celebrated her ministry with these words:

“. . . in the manner of a modern-day Deborah, you have fulfilled your pledge to make a ministry of administration through your industriousness, facilitative management style, insistence on personnel policies and practices conducive to affirmative action, and your harnessing of new technologies to improve the record-keeping and research functions which are vital to the efficient execution of the Church's business.”

Everyone agreed that under the oversight of Carol Joyce Brun the General Synod became “fairer and more inclusive, offering a voice to all who would speak.” Furthermore, given her long tenure in the national offices her institutional memory was highly valued. She was sometimes jokingly referred to as the “canon lawyer” of the UCC.

Carol Joyce Brun's advocacy for women, however, was no joke. One of her passions was the Historical Council and she gave strong support to its Women's History Project. At the time of her election she stated her desire to remember that when she took on new challenges there would be girls and women who might hear her, or read of her or see her and thereby gain better understandings of how “women can provide leadership and be up-front.” When she left office eight years later, people celebrated the fact that “Carol's entire ministry had broken new paths for women.”

In 1991, however, Carol's ministry was not done. From

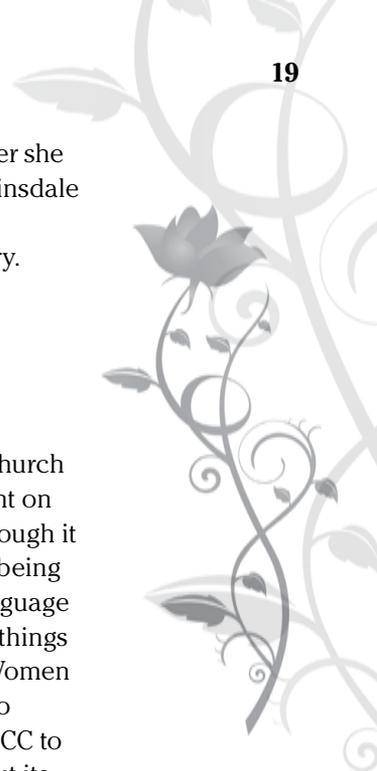
1991 to 2004 Carol Joyce (as she called herself after she left the national offices) served as pastor of Robbinsdale United Church of Christ in Robbinsdale, MN. In retirement she continued active in interim ministry.

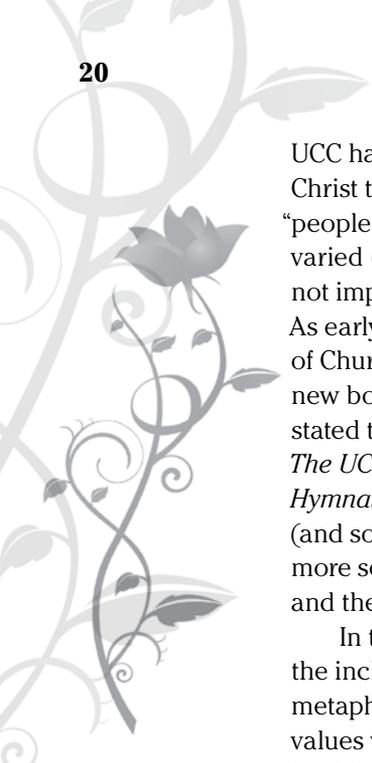
Women and Inclusive Language

In 1971, when the General Synod of the United Church of Christ adopted its pioneering “Pronouncement on the Status of Women in Church and Society”, although it listed nine areas of work related to women’s well-being in the United Church of Christ, concern about language was not even mentioned. By June 1973, however, things had changed. The newly created Task Force on Women in Church and Society asked the General Synod to pass a “Statement on Women” which called the UCC to become more self-conscious and intentional about its use of language. It challenged church bodies to educate UCC members about the “issues and sensitivities involved in the writing and using of inclusive language.” It requested that the *Constitution and Bylaws* of the UCC be changed to make all language deliberately inclusive. It declared that from now on printed materials published and used officially by the UCC should be written (or rewritten when revised) to make all language deliberately inclusive. [1973 *GS Minutes*, p.8]

Reactions to the issue of language were/are emotional and even divisive. Women (and men) who grow up assuming that mankind and brotherhood refer to women as well as men, and who pray to God the Father, sometimes feel that trying to make all language “inclusive” is picky and not important. At the same time other women (and some men) argue that when people use predominantly masculine words and pronouns to refer to human beings and to God, it leads to distorted assumptions about gender roles and about God.

During the past thirty years female leaders in the





UCC have regularly challenged the United Church of Christ to use more inclusive language, insisting that “people language” needs to be comprehensive and varied (humankind) and that “God language” should not imply that God is masculine (Father, Lord, Master). As early as 1977 the General Synod requested the Office of Church Life and Leadership (OCLL) to develop a new book of worship using inclusive language. It also stated that an inclusive language hymnal was needed. *The UCC Book of Worship* (1986) and *The New Century Hymnal* (1995) are a direct result of the efforts of women (and some men) to make UCC leaders and members more sensitive to the impact of language on theology and the ongoing life of the church.

In the 1990s the United Church of Christ revisited the inclusive language issue, noting that using military metaphors (soldiers, crusades and war), equating values with colors (black as evil and white as good), implying that persons with disabilities are deficient, and perpetuating cultural and racist stereotypes (Indians are devious, Hispanics cannot learn English, Asians are all the same) were unacceptable habits in the United Church of Christ. [*Common Lot*, Spring 1990, # 52]

Conversation about inclusive language never ends. There are UCC members who insist that prohibiting certain words and promoting linguistic variety is the only way to sustain radical Christian hospitality and worship God who is “the Word beyond words.” There are other UCC members who question linguistic changes (biblical and liturgical) because they believe that changing words changes meanings and puts our Christian faith at risk. Consequently, within the United Church of Christ there remains a great deal of linguistic variety. In spite of the ongoing efforts of many UCC women (and a handful of men), in spite of multiple pronouncements and resolutions debated at General Synods, the importance of “inclusive language” continues to stretch and challenge.

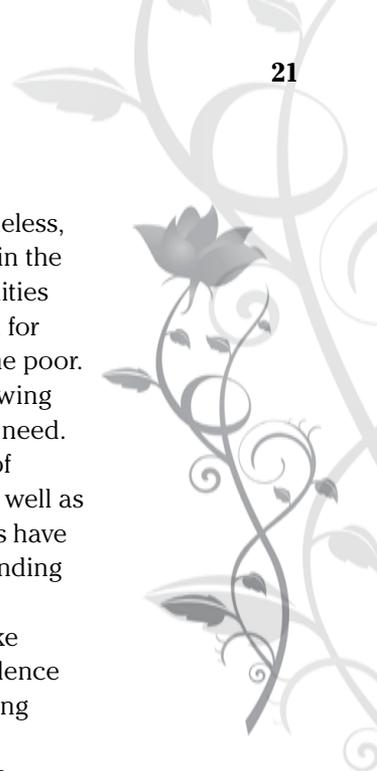
Violence in Relation to Women

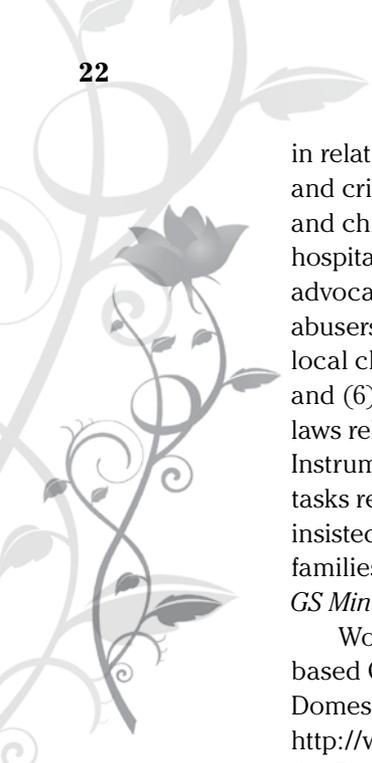
The legacy of women's work for others (the homeless, imprisoned, uneducated and poor) runs deep in the history of the Christian Church. In many communities church women have provided hospitality, worked for justice, educated the children and provided for the poor. In recent decades, however, there has been a growing acknowledgement that women themselves are in need. Women, more than men, are victims of all kinds of violence and the church is part of the problem as well as the solution. During the past 20 years UCC leaders have challenged church and society to rethink longstanding ideas and assumptions about women.

Popular theology and sexual stereotypes make this difficult, causing church people to ignore violence against women (even against themselves). Thinking that women have always confronted risks related to reproduction and childbirth, suffered alongside men, and experienced violence in family and cultural conflicts, many Christians consider violence in the lives of women normal.

More recently people have begun rejecting stereotypes condoning male sexual aggression/misuse of power and encouraging female docility/acceptance. Theological assumptions that women, as descendants of Eve, deserve what they get, no longer prevail. Furthermore, leaders in church and society have learned to talk openly about sexual harassment and violence, topics earlier considered taboo. In 1979 the US Department of Health and Welfare established an Office on Domestic Violence.

By 1981 the General Synod of the United Church of Christ passed a "Resolution on Violence in Relation to Women" requesting the preparation of a major "Pronouncement" with concrete proposals for action. The resulting Pronouncement (1983) called upon all parts of the UCC to become proactive in: (1) raising the consciousness of clergy and laity about violence





in relation to women, (2) working to support hot lines and crisis centers as safe places for abused women and children, (3) helping schools, churches and hospitals establish educational programs for parents, (4) advocating for legislation to protect victims and bring abusers into rehabilitation programs, (5) encouraging local churches to minister to the abused and abusers, and (6) prodding Conferences to advocate for new laws related to sexual violence. Various Boards and Instrumentalities in the UCC were charged with specific tasks related to these concerns. The Pronouncement insisted that there can be no “peace in the world or in families while violence against women continues.” [1983 *GS Minutes*, 52-55]

Work on this issue was enriched by the Seattle based Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence [now the Faith Trust Institute <http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org>] founded in 1977 by the Rev. Marie Fortune, a UCC minister. Initially the Center focused upon education, clergy training and pastoral care for sexual assault survivors. After 1979 its advocacy and education expanded to include the religious issues of child abuse and domestic violence and after 1983 it turned its attention to sexual abuse by pastors, developing a nationally recognized clergy ethics program.

For over three decades the UCC Coordinating Center for Women (CCW) has worked closely with many organizations inside the UCC and in the wider community to raise awareness about the impact of violence on women and children. In 1985 the General Synod passed a resolution condemning acts of violence against reproductive health care facilities. In 1989 the General Synod passed a resolution on sexual harassment in the church – insisting that the topic could no longer remain “Nameless.” Resolutions were passed on deploring violence against lesbian and gay people (1989), on re-evaluating the sentences of battered

women in US prisons (1993), on the brutalization and objectification of women in times of war (1993), on creating a world safe for children free from violence (1995), on violence in our society and world (1995), and on female genital mutilation (1997).

Women in the United Church of Christ have learned how to speak out and name the power of violence in many settings. They know that violence is not simply a personal problem; it pervades the structures of church and society, defining the ways women and men relate to each other socially, politically, economically and spiritually. As the United Church of Christ aspires to be a multiracial multicultural, just peace, open and affirming and accessible to all church, UCC women insist that violence must not be hidden and that the church has a calling to make the whole world a “safe place” for women and children.

Conclusion

Women in the United Church of Christ love their church and many of them give generously of time and talent that it might flourish. Yet, for fifty years UCC women have also written and spoken out about issues that limit their lives as Christians and citizens. They have turned to local church groups, created regional feminist networks and encouraged the national witness of the UCC to support the faithfulness of women.

In the 1980s one feminist UCC scholar pointed out that the openness of the United Church of Christ is sometimes “only an apparent openness.” The United Church of Christ welcomes “add-ons,” and as with barnacles on a ship, there is always room for one more. Unfortunately, barnacles “rarely affect the core structure of the vessel or its course” and the add-ons are simply “taken along for the ride.” The question remains, whether



the United Church of Christ is “genuinely re-visioning and not simply tinkering with” the traditions of church and theology related to women, and whether it really has been “stretched by the more radical expressions of women’s experience of the transcendent.” [Sharon Ringe, “Feminist Theology and the United Church of Christ” (1985) reprinted in *The Living Theological Heritage of the United Church of Christ*, Volume VII, (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 355-65.]

The story is not over, but for many UCC women the words of feminist writer Nelle Morton are their inspiration, “the journey is home.”