

women's concerns

June 1985 Issue 29

Stories of Third-World Women

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by Elizabeth Macdonald

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Women's Concerns is prepared four times a year by Ministry with Adults — Women in the Division of Mission in Canada of The United Church of Canada. It keeps women in touch with each other as well as keeping us aware of issues that affect our lives. One of its purposes is to provide an opportunity for you to share your experiences as you grow and struggle on your journey to wholeness in Christ.

Send us your own story, a meaningful Bible study or poem, news about women in the church or your reflections on issues of the day. The Editorial Committee reserves the right to edit for space and clarity, while maintaining the original content.

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Editorial

Third-World Women

God who is mighty has done great things for me...God has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree. (Luke 1: 49, 52)

In our struggle to overcome the discrimination and exploitation that women experience, many of us are increasingly identifying with Mary and claiming her words in the *Magnificat* as our own. We identify ourselves with "those of low degree" as we long for the day when God will exalt all who are oppressed. We identify the "mighty in their thrones" as other people, those in positions of power and privilege, most often men. In the context of our own experience, such identification is justified. Women are not as well off as men in just about every aspect of Canadian life. However, such identification is thrown into question when we expand our perspective beyond our particular community or country to global proportions.

When she was in Toronto last fall, Rosemary Radford Ruether was asked why the prophets of Israel were blind to the injustices against women when they saw other injustices so clearly. She pointed out that it is human nature to be much more aware of who is oppressing you than of whom you yourself are oppressing. Then she challenges the audience, especially the women, to look down as well as up, to see who it is who is caught under their feet.

This issue of *Women's Concerns* challenges us to expand our perspective to global proportions by listening to the experience of third-world women and by learning more about their reality. What the editorial team discovered in the process of putting this newsletter together was that in listening to and learning from third-world women, we get a much clearer view of who, in fact, it is that is caught under our own North American feet. The team faced the uncomfortable, even painful truth that while we do share some things in common as women, our wealth and privilege as North Americans place us much closer to "the mighty on their thrones" than we ever wanted to think ourselves, and much farther away from third-world women and "those of low degree" than we had previously imagined.

The distance became evident in the stories of Marta from Cuernavaca, Mexico, and Tereza and Pascasia, two refugees in Ethiopia: powerful stories of unspeakable horror these women have been forced to endure, and the hope that lies in their strength and faith. Janet Silman shares a conversation with an African journalist about the crucial roles women play in

Marta

agriculture. Maureen Kabwe also reports from Africa. Deborah Marshall reflects on her trip to Cuernavaca. Ana Ortega, a Chilean living in exile in Canada, writes about the freedom-seeking and justice-seeking efforts of women in Chile. Spirituality combines both prayer and action; and so prayer, poetry, hymns and other spiritual resources are also included in an effort to be integrative and wholistic.

It is not easy to hear Janet Silman's warning that "as members of the affluent West, we face spiritual bankruptcy". But true to the prophetic tradition, Janet includes with her warning, words of hope: "Our only hope for an authentic spirituality lies in the poor and dispossessed befriending us."

It is our hope, in offering you this issue on third-world women, that we Canadian Christian women will open ourselves and listen to third-world women so that in the hearing of their stories, we will find the courage and will to face their suffering and our privilege, their strength and our need; that we will respond as they reach out to befriend us.



by Deborah Marshall

The scripture for morning reflection was *The Magnificat*. We listened to the familiar words of Mary and tried to hear them in a new way, to hear them the way the poor of Latin America might hear them, as revolutionary words of promise for the poor and judgment for the rich:

My soul magnifies the Lord,
And my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.
For God has regarded the low estate of
God's handmaiden; for, behold, from
henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

For God who is mighty has done great things
for me...

God has put down the mighty from their
thrones and exalted those of low degree.

God has filled the hungry with good things;
and has sent the rich empty away.

(Luke 1: 46-55)

We listened, we shared, we prayed, we went out to visit Marta.

Thirteen white North American women unsteadily made their way, from rock to rock, alongside the ravine stream choked with overflow sewage from city cesspools and smelling of human waste.

We were on our way to Marta's house, a small squatter shack pitched precariously on the side of one of Cuernavaca's five ravines. The wealthy own land high up on the sides of the ravine, with a view; the poor are permitted to take land and construct crude homes, down at the bottom, near the sight and smell of the stream. The children of the poor learn to walk along the edges of this stream and play balancing games from rock to rock within the stream. We, too, had to play those balancing games, as we headed upstream to Marta's.

Marta was waiting in her 18' by 18' room to tell us her story, a story of violence, poverty, of working hard and getting nowhere. As she spoke through the interpreter, she stood, eyes downcast and unsmiling, and recounted how her mother had died when she was one and the grandmother who then cared for her died, when she was four. Before the grandmother died, she had threatened to kill Marta so that she wouldn't suffer as the grandmother had during her life. After the death of her grandmother, Marta went to her father and the eight children of his second family. Her stepmother expected much from Marta and held her hands over the fire when she did not satisfy those expectations.

At 12, Marta was raped by a stranger, married him, and had three children by him, even though she did not like him. She later left him for, she said, "a worse man", a

Marta

drinker and a gambler, with whom she is still living. "But," she added, lifting her eyes and showing a slight smile, "sometimes he helps me with my embroidery." Marta, despite failing eyesight, makes blouses to sell to visitors to Mexico. "Some day I would like to have one of my blouses for myself," she told us sadly. "I have never been able to keep one."

In her small house, which had not been serviced by water for the two weeks prior to our visit, Marta lives with five children and assorted relatives who stop by, seeking shelter. Her 12-year-old daughter does housework for a richer woman, the eight-year-old usually goes to school (when Marta has money to buy the supplies), the five-year-old cares for the sickly three-year-old while Marta does domestic work for 3000 pesos per week, the equivalent of \$15.00 U.S. On 3000 pesos per week, Marta can only afford to feed her family tortillas, beans, and black coffee. The day before our visit, Marta had been fired for not meeting the expectations of her employer.

Marta had hopes of economic survival but finds that every day things are more expensive. (The general inflation rate in 1984 was 65%; the inflation rate for food, 200%, while wage increases were held to 20%, for the few workers covered by legislation. Sometimes relatives buy things and charge them to Marta who has a reputation for paying her bills.

When asked about her hopes for her children, Marta dropped her eyes and said, "I'd like to be able to give them everything they need, especially bread and milk."

"I ask God for things — for calmness; for food for my children. God helps me in many ways. Sometimes I go to a church alone to pray. But the church has never helped me."

Awkwardly, one of us asked how she felt about sharing her story with us. "I am content when you go," she said slowly. "Talking to you takes a weight off my heart."

Remembering those words and thinking about the solidarity they demand, we left silently and made our way out along the ravine stream. We would never be the same again. We had seen the face of the suffering Christ in Marta. We wondered when the *Magnificat* would become her song.

Deborah Marshall, a member of the *Women's Concerns* Editorial Committee, was part of a group of Canadian women who spent November 19 — December 3, 1984, in a programme "Women and Development", at the Cuernavaca Centre for Intercultural Dialogue on Development in Mexico.

You are invited to make inquiry from her about another such experience November 19 — December 2, 1985.

Author Unknown

(former student at Cuernavaca Center for Intercultural Dialog on Development)

Humble handmaiden of the Lord
Singing with your tears the *Magnificat*
Touching hundreds
with your tears of pain.

In your poverty
feeding us who are starving to
death on diets of materialism
In your failing sight
opening our eyes to the struggle
of the oppressed

Curing us from our paralysis
healing our trembling limbs
so we can reach out
and embrace
our sisters and brothers in
love
and justice.

You are the Christ
healing our afflictions
and blindness
our paralysis
our atrophied limbs
melting our hearts of stone.

So that we too can be the Christ
to others

Like the humble virgin — dear Marta
you are the subject of poems
songs
essays

perhaps even books.

Far more than any of us
you have touched the lives
of hundreds
and through them perhaps
thousands.

Far more than any of us
you have moved to action
hundreds
and through them perhaps
thousands.

You have done more than priests
presidents
governors
bishops

to set your people free.

You are the defiled virgin
singing with your tears to us
to the world
the *Magnificat*

María, Liberación Del Pueblo

A Sign of Hope for Women

by Deborah Marshall

María, Liberación Del Pueblo (Mary, Liberation of the People), is a monthly publication edited by a collective of nine Mexican women for their peers in the *colonias* (poor neighbourhoods) of the area around Cuernavaca.

These nine women, many of whom were unable to read when they began working on the newspaper nine years ago, meet together each week in order to plan, write and edit *María*, the purpose of which is to raise the awareness of other poor women about health, child care, nutrition, herb medicine, family dynamics, political analysis, and news about other Latin American countries. Each issue contains articles, cartoons, global-awareness activities, and a "photo novel" about a topic of social concern. Recent issues have had photo novels, photographed in the *colonias*, on such topics as contraception, inflation and the cost of living, communication between parents and children.

Two thousand copies of each issue are printed and distributed by the women themselves. Along with the newspapers, they offer short courses in their neighbourhoods in the hope that things can change for women in a macho and violent society. *María* receives some funding from Methodist women in the United States; they welcome donations or subscriptions from others as well.

All nine women emerged from neighbourhood base Christian communities. In these Bible study groups, women and men study the scripture and see their own oppression and also see that God is on their side - God is god of the poor; God hates injustice; God works with the people for liberation and justice in the structures of their own society. As the women discussed ways in which they could experience liberation, they thought of a newspaper which would spread a hopeful word to other Mexican women and which would advocate for political change. The nine have found acceptance from some of their husbands and from other men, especially those who see them as companions in a common struggle to change the power-structures of their own society. They have invited men to write some articles for *María*, but the women do most of the work themselves.

When asked what they had learned through this editorial experience, one woman answered, "It's nice to be outside the home. *María* frees us from slavery to our homes; here we learn many good things — but especially we have learned that we, as women, have value and that we can do a lot to improve ourselves and our society."

Another commented, "I now spend half of my time

with *María*; half of my time at home. My children understand and support me."

A third added, "Our work is the promotion of women. We have value at home and in society. We learn as we help others because we go as companions of other women. For example, very few can afford milk anymore; so we have taught the use of soybeans instead."

"We came in contact with the Bible and saw new things. We hope that things can change for other women as well."

In Latin America, Mary has long been a revered symbol of the worth of women in the plan of God. Now the

Prayer for Central America

O God,
forgive your church
its wealth among the poor
its fear among the unjust
its cowardice among the oppressed.
forgive us our lack of hope in your reign
our lack of faith in your presence
our lack of trust in your mercy.
forgive our worship of death in our longing for
our own security
our own survival
our own private peace.
God restore us to covenant with all your people.
We affirm with hope your presence in the world.
You see the broken, the tortured, the disappeared
in Central America and say:
"These are my brothers and sisters."
God, inspire us with your hope,
challenge us with your truth,
empower us with your strength
to live for life in the midst of death,
to translate our vision and hope into action. Amen.

Adapted from and used by permission of the Inter-Religious Task Force on Central America, New York.

That Name is "Woman"

by Ana Ortega

During the past 10 years of military dictatorship in Chile, women have been humiliated, beaten, imprisoned, tortured and assassinated. Many have been sent into exile or have disappeared. Since the September 1973 coup d'état that destroyed the legitimate government of President Allende, many women have lost their families: their husbands have been kidnapped by government forces and remain "missing" or have been killed; their sons and daughters have also "disappeared". In spite of everything, women have formed numerous committees in opposition to the dictatorship. Women have always fought for a just system for themselves and their families. In Chile, women have founded:

- an association of relatives of disappeared people
- a committee for the defence of fundamental human rights
- Christian base communities
- artisan workshops
- neighbourhood committees
- soup kitchens

Today, women facing the dictatorship have taken to the streets of Santiago, demanding freedom and protesting government economic policies. They are marching in Santiago shouting slogans against the junta. They teach the population how to organize themselves; they train other women to clean wounds and to treat persons injured in confrontations with the police forces.

On December 29, 1983, over 5,000 women gathered in Santiago's Caupolicán theatre to declare once again their unbroken commitment to build a new society for themselves and their families. On this day women danced the "cueca sola". Cueca is the traditional dance of Chile performed in couples. The cueca sola, however, is an adaptation of the dance, with the woman dancing alone because her companion has disappeared.

On March 8, 1984, when thousands of women in the world were celebrating International Woman's Day, Chilean women were in the streets in Santiago forming a human chain — in solidarity with all the women imprisoned by the dictatorship. They demanded freedom for their imprisoned friends and asked the government to tell them the whereabouts of their relatives.

The freedom of my country today has a name, and that name is "woman".

Ana Ortega is a Chilean woman living in exile in Canada. She is currently working at the Inter-Church

Committee on Human Rights in Latin America and is a member of the Task Force on Labour of the Canadian Affairs Commission of the Canadian Council of Churches.

From the October, 1984 *Churchmouse*; reprinted by permission.

A Sign of Hope for Women

continued

focus is changing from a passive, receptive Mary to an active and revolutionary Mary, who sees that her child will offer a new social and economic order and who consequently foresees the overthrow of the powerful and the raising of the weak to positions of influence. This Mary is a symbol of affirmation for the women of *María*.

In Latin America, many women have María as their first or second name. It is said that rich employers often call any domestic worker María (the anonymous), rather than take the pains to consider a worker a full person with unique identity. In this way *María* stands in solidarity with the unknown, anonymous every-woman of Latin America.

María, Liberación Del Pueblo, a sign of hope for women in Latin America, celebrated its ninth anniversary recently. The editorial staff of *Women's Concerns* wrote to congratulate them and wish them well as they "continue working together to make their Christian faith live through the pages of *María, Liberación Del Pueblo*." Their editorial committee has responded and welcomes an ongoing sister relationship with us and with other women of The United Church of Canada.

For subscriptions to this Spanish publication, send an international money order for \$15.00 U.S. to *María, Liberación Del Pueblo*, Avenida Morelos No. 714, Apartado Postal 158-B, 62190, Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico.

The Struggle for Life in Central America



We have to repeat
continuously,
although it is a
voice crying in
the desert,
No to violence,
Yes to peace.

- Archbishop
Oscar Romero

Refugee Women in Africa: Two Stories

by Janet Silman

The official count of refugees in Africa is three million, though the actual number could be twice as high. The majority of displaced persons are women and their children; in many instances, the *vast* majority.

What follows are interviews I had in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, recently with two African refugee women. I share them not so much because they are either typical or extraordinary, but because they give a glimpse of women known to us usually only as statistics.

Tereza, a thin, sad-looking woman in her 30's from Zaire:

I was born in the town of Bunia. After independence in the 1960's, a civil war was going on. Lorries were collecting children to take them to a safer place away from the fighting. I was separated from my parents and have never heard from them since. I was 14.

An older friend took me with her to the border of Sudan. There we were handed over to the Sudanese authorities. In Sudan I helped her to survive — we had a bread business and sold fried fish on the street. Luckily my friend happened to get a husband. But I could get no help from any organization, so decided to come to Ethiopia where someone from my own clan told me you could get help.

Getting across the border was very hard. I was about 18 then, the only woman travelling with four men. We went through the bush and it took us a month. The guerrillas were killing many people — anybody they found — and there were bandits. Afterwards, everyone was amazed we were not killed. It was only God's love that got us through.

It was so dangerous some in the party said, "We have to go back," but others said, "If it is death, then it is death," and we kept going. We moved only at night and hid during the day. We had nothing, and had to ask for help along the way from the villagers, who were very poor themselves.

Villagers risked their own lives to help us, giving us food, shelter, directions and advice. Fortunately we had one person who knew the language and the terrain, but it was very hard...

Comment

When the party crossed into Ethiopia the men were arrested and Tereza was kept at a military officer's house. Then they all were transported to the capital, Addis Ababa, and handed over to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. Since then, she has received

a subsistence allowance from the UNHCR, but as a foreigner cannot get work. Coming from a different culture, after ten years she still has no Ethiopian friends. She has little hope of realizing her dream which is to set up a little dressmaking business.

Pascasia, a well-groomed, single woman born in Rwanda in 1946, mother of two children:

(She wears a hearing aid and apologizes for her difficulty in hearing.) Tribal fighting began in our village in 1959. Every year our houses were burned. We would escape, then try to get back; but the houses of people who tried

Militarism In Central America Condemned by GC

The following resolution was passed at the 30th General Council of The United Church of Canada, 1984.

WHEREAS the right to self-determination of the Central American people is threatened by U.S. policy in the region, and

WHEREAS the increasing militarization of the region threatens to plunge Central America into a regional war.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That the 30th General Council of The United Church of Canada, through its Secretariat, urge the Canadian Government to

1. Strongly and publicly condemn all military intervention in Central America, especially the evident military intervention of The United States of America and call for the withdrawal of all foreign troops.
2. Commend the Canadian Government for opening an \$18 million line of credit to the Government of Nicaragua and to urge the extension of new lines of credit to the Government of Nicaragua.
3. Open an embassy in Nicaragua so that there may be better lines of communication between the two countries.

to stay were burned. Finally in 1964 my family became refugees, fleeing into Uganda.

Since 1970 the president of Rwanda has changed and the government is better, but my tribe is not free to say what they think and our children cannot study law or medicine. If I went back, I would have to speak out if I saw something wrong. If I did not speak out when I saw something wrong, I would have mental problems; if I did speak out, I would get into trouble. So I cannot go back. I have more freedom here.

In Uganda both my parents died. I got some education, but the situation in Uganda was terrible. At that time a man disturbed me and I got pregnant before marriage. I worried for the baby so I decided to come to Ethiopia.

During school the Roman Catholic missionaries had helped me with pocket money which I never spent, but saved in a post office box. I got to Kenya with that money and bought a plane ticket into Ethiopia because I thought that was safest for the baby. The refugee office in Ethiopia would not believe I was a refugee, however, because, how could a refugee afford a plane ticket? It was two years before they would believe that I was a refugee.

Comment

Pascasia then told me a long, painful story of how she had lost her only friend through the woman's boss lying about her to her friend. A devout Christian, she viewed the assistance she finally did receive from the refugee agency as a miracle. Her second child, like her first, was the result of a man "disturbing" her — I think her word for rape.

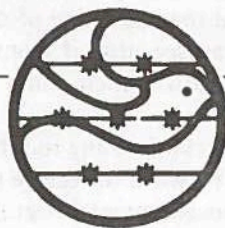
Both these women's stories brought home to me the vulnerability and loneliness, as well as the grinding hardship, that millions of refugee women face daily. They literally are "strangers in a strange land," bereft of family and friends, living in an alien culture unable to look after "its own", much less refugees.

As relatively affluent women, we need to develop links with such women. Networks in the world church already exist; and if every woman's group in the United Church made contact and developed a relationship with a particular group in a Third World country, our vision of sisterhood would move closer to realization.

I came home from my brief African experience even more convinced that, as members of the affluent West, we face spiritual bankruptcy. Our only hope for an authentic spirituality lies in the poor and dispossessed befriending us. For this to occur, we need to reach out

through the channels available, to listen to them. We need a "spiritual will". Our hope and their hope are not two separate entities: they are one.

Janet Silman, a member of the Editorial Committee, has recently returned from Africa where she represented The United Church of Canada at a meeting in Nairobi of the WCC Commission for World Mission and Evangelism. She spent an additional two weeks in Ethiopia researching an article for the April 1985 *United Church Observer*. Janet, a doctoral student at Toronto School of Theology, writes a monthly Bible study for the *Observer*.



Information Latin America

The Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America (ICCHRLA) is an ecumenical organization established and supported by the major Canadian Christian churches as a response to the growing problems of human rights violations in Latin America. The work of ICCHRLA includes support for Latin American sisters and brothers who are engaged in the struggle to achieve social justice by changing the conditions in which human rights violations are rooted as well as denouncing the more visible and gross instances of human rights abuses.

The *ICCHRLA Newsletter* provides in-depth information and analysis on events and human rights developments in Latin American countries. The information provided is based on frequent visits to the area, fact-finding missions and materials that arrive daily at the office. 4 issues/year.

To subscribe to the *Newsletter*, send \$13.00 (individual) or \$25.00 (institution) for a year's subscription to ICCHRLA, Suite 201, 40 St. Clair Ave. E., Toronto, ON M4T 1M9 (Tel: 416 - 921-4152).

If Women Put Down Their Hoes...

by Janet Silman

Headlines in the African press in 1985 suggest that consciousness regarding women is on the rise in Africa: "Ghanaian women resort to smuggling to survive"; "Nyere laments exploitation of African women"; "Zimbabwean women spearhead conversation". Whether or not this initial impression is indeed accurate, individual African women — including women in the church — are developing clear and startling analyses of the position of women in African society. The picture emerging is one of desperation and courage, suffering and inspirational strength.

What follows is a conversation with a young African woman journalist who agreed to be interviewed on the condition that her name be withheld:

"Here in Kenya, 65% of rural families are headed by women. 90% of Kenya's population is rural. 80% of our food is grown by women, and the backbone of our economy is agriculture. So you can see, that if women went on strike — if they put down their hoes — everybody would starve.

"Women do most of the commercial farming too, but in the background — the men go forward to receive the cheques. Farming courses and development programmes are directed at men. So is education; hence men's literacy level is higher than women's. The 'head of the household' is assumed to be male, consequently women are rendered invisible.

"In commercial cash-crop farming, production tends to be higher when men go back to farm, but that is because men use technology such as tractors, which women cannot afford. Women cannot sign for loans themselves. Men want to 'feel like a man' around the house so they do not let women get too far ahead. Hence few women get loans.

"The government is looking for foreign exchange so it encourages people to spend less time on subsistence farming and instead grow commercial crops, many of which are not edible. This results in malnutrition because people are spending less and less time growing food crops.

"Colonial administrations came to exploit the land. Because they needed raw materials, they introduced commercial farming. They also tried to create the impression traditional crops were primitive and uncultured; that the sooner they were done away with, the better. They were 'weeds' to be uprooted. Actually some traditional crops were drought-resistant, while new exotic crops are not.

"The Europeans introduced planting in rows,

whereas before intercropping had been practised. Since the African sun is hot, without the 'bush' cover, the fragile soil breaks down, resulting in erosion, poorer crops and hence, malnutrition.

"When tractors are used, large tracts of land are needed, therefore people are forced into less fertile areas. Meanwhile the population is growing. The continuous clearing of marginal lands has led to environmental destruction and desertification. With increased cash-cropping has come the clearing of forests and the drastic reduction of water catchment areas. Then when the rains do come, the soil is washed away into the sea.

"What this all means for the woman is that she has to work harder to get food from the more marginal land. Each year the land becomes more impoverished. She has to travel further and further for firewood and water. Consequently women today work even harder than their grandmothers had to work.

"With no firewood, women are forced to buy paraffin or charcoal with money that should have gone for food. This necessary action increases malnutrition. To compound matters, people have been brainwashed into thinking that anything African is backward and should be abandoned. Therefore people are adopting Western diets. Women are buying pop instead of oranges, selling good food to buy white flour and white sugar.

"This cannot be the end of the story, though. We have to find solutions. Education for women is essential: literacy classes, nutrition and hygiene, the importance of traditional foods, clinics for basic health care, community organization.

"We still have a problem with women going to the baby bottle instead of breast-feeding. We have to warn women of the dangers of tobacco too, which increasingly is being marketed in our countries.

"We have to warn people of the dangers of pesticides and herbicides since many cannot read the instructions on labels. We have to affirm many of the traditional ways which actually are better for the environment and for us.

"We need reforestation and growth of food rather than luxury cash crops. Many African values such as the welcoming of visitors — including refugees — are good and to be celebrated and kept."

If women put down their hoes, everybody in Africa would starve....

There is a Day Coming

by Maureen Scott Kabwe

March 10

Anticipation fills me with excitement. Back in Africa, I am warmly received with the natural African grace and hospitality that always profoundly moves those who experience it. In four weeks, I will journey through Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, to see at firsthand the church's commitment to mission, women, development. Here in Dar-es-Salaam, the signs of economic struggle are noticeable, but become ever more visible as we travel into the interior.

I know the statistics. Women are 50% of the world's population, perform 2/3 of the world's work hours, receive 1/10 of the world's income, own 1/100 of its property, are 80% of the food producers in the Two-Thirds World, and with their children are seven out of every ten refugees. They often have little access to the decision-making processes of their village, government, or church. In the context of underdevelopment, women suffer that much more.

March 13

After a dusty, two-day trip by Landrover, I am in Tabora, in a valley of beehives and honey. All along the way I have seen the women burdened down with heavy loads of firewood, water, or mealie flour, their babies on their backs. Or, I have seen them hoeing under the hot sun in their small shambas (fields). Most of them are seeing their first maturing crops in three years.

For the next few days, we will be visiting some of the development projects promoted by one of our overseas partners, the Christian Council of Tanzania. As I walk through the town, I notice the co-existence of Moslem, Hindu, Ishmaili, and Christian places of worship. Traditional religion is also practised. I am also becoming aware of how much of a luxury are my simple, store-bought sandals. Shoes turn into the symbol of the North's extreme over-abundance, and the South's always visible scarcity of basic needs and resources.

March 16

We have arrived at a rural vocational school in Mafinga. I meet a young student in the agricultural course who wants to specialize in animal husbandry in order to help her village develop healthier and more productive livestock. Rural farming skills and appropriate tools are desperately needed. Her self-confidence, gained from her new knowledge, becomes evident as we talk; and I remember the story of Jesus and the bent-over woman who finally discovers she can stand straight. The words I hear over and over are UMOJA or unity, self-reliance, economic self-sufficiency, human dignity and participation (let's all pull together).

At every stop, we are fed by our hosts with simple but

nourishing food. For our trip back down the mountains, Mrs. Malewa has prepared a bag filled with hard-boiled eggs from the students' chickens. We drive past miles and miles of *Brooke Bond* Tea Estates, flourishing in this part of the country.

A few days later, at the Women's Training Centre at Morogoro, we meet a group of young parish workers from all over the country on a three-month course. One of them shyly hands me the garment she is learning a stitch on. As I finish off the seam, we laugh and talk in ki Swahili and English, our interpreter's skill the bridge. Later the worship, songs and community we experience are, as usual, wonderful.

March 22

Mindolo Ecumenical Centre, Kitwe, Zambia. I have arrived just in time for a Women's Rights conference, part of the preparation for the final meeting in Nairobi, this summer, of the U.N. Decade of Women. Everywhere I go, I am given the reports being put together by women's organizations and church agencies. Here, I sit in on discussions ranging from women in industry to polygamy to the law of succession (after a man's death, the children and property are taken by his family, not the wife). Family issues and community development needs predominate in the discussion. Educated leadership is impressive; but there are still few rural, poor women present. I am impressed with the level of ecumenical work in each country.

April 7

Harare. I am enjoying the company of Shirley Ross, one of our mission personnel serving with ALOZ, Adult Literacy Organization of Zimbabwe. This resurrection Sunday the Archbishop preaches on courageous women, starting with the women at the tomb. Two weeks ago, all churches observed a Day of National Thanksgiving for Rain, following the three-year drought. But, in many parts of Africa, relief has yet to come.

I continue to meet committed, engaged people in the churches and service and development agencies. Zimbabweans say that the war of national liberation was won with the cooking stick — by the courageous deeds of the women (and children), as well as the men. This involvement of women is still proving true of the other liberation movements struggling for freedom in Southern Africa, as well.

The struggles for liberation continue. Few try to underestimate the forces of suffering and oppression,

whether racial, gender-based, economic, or spiritual. In spite of all this, I am constantly shown signs of God's promise and hope. We are all invited to discover and live our faith through commitment to walk with "the least of these". I have received many gifts. In Tanzania, I was given a basket woven with the Swahili words IKO SIKU or "that is the day". In Isaiah we read, "...the leopard shall lie with the kid... the evildoers will burn like stubble... the root of Jesse shall stand as a sign to all the peoples.... in that day". And I add, seven women will say, "we will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes... in that day."

Maureen Scott Kabwe is on the staff of Montreal and Ottawa Conference, The United Church of Canada, as Animator for Mission and Justice Education. She recently returned on a study project to Africa, where she previously served with CUSO in Zambia for two years and lived and worked in rural areas as a volunteer in adult literacy, under five clinics for five years. This spring she travelled with Jim Kirkwood, Africa Secretary of the Division of World Outreach.

UC Response to Africa Drought

By March, 1985, The United Church of Canada had responded to the Africa drought with gifts totalling \$1,680,967 for famine relief in 11 countries. Government matching grants of \$2,095,000 were generated by these UCC monies. In addition, United Church members donated \$283,532 to the Food Grain Bank (matched by \$850,595 government funds). *Total facilitated through the United Church* to that date was \$4,910,094. Presbytery and presbyterial World Outreach convenors have further information on the drought situation and the United Church's response.

The United Church response to the Africa drought to the end of March is detailed as follows:

From World Development			
& Relief	-	\$ 129,500	Government
Division of World Outreach	-	300,000	matching
Trust Fund Allocations	-	90,055	grants
Supragifts (special designated contributions)	-	1,161,412	
		<hr/>	
		\$1,680,967	\$2,095,000

to Tigray and Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Sudan, Sahel, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Ghana, Angola, Zambia, Guinea Bissau, African Refugees, Food Grain Bank.

By United Church members direct to Food Grain Bank \$283,532 (plus government matching grant of \$850,595).

Tad Mitsui, a United Church member of staff of the Canadian Council of Churches, has been seconded to the World Council of Churches for an 18-month period, to assist in coordinating the WCC drought appeal.

Central American Women Speak for Themselves

This resource on women and women's organizations in Central America today is a compendium of articles, documents, testimonies and photographs, illustrating the present condition and participation of women. It is part of an important dialogue between Central American and Canadian women.

To order, send \$7.00 per copy, plus 20 percent postage and handling, to Latin American Working Group (LAWG),

PO Box 2207, Station P
Toronto, ON M5S 2T2
(Tel: 416 - 533-4221)

Come Holy Spirit

Come Holy Spirit, we feel your wind blowing
It buffets the walls of our safe little lives.
Give us the courage to let those walls crumble,
And stand in the open, afraid but alive.

Come Holy Spirit with strength and compassion
To open our minds and our hearts and our eyes.
Give us the courage to face in your presence
The sights and the visions, the calls and the cries.

Come Holy Spirit and kindle among us
The pure fire of justice, and love's softer flame.
Give us the courage, the will, and the wisdom
To transform the world by the power of your name.

Judy Fetter

Tune: Uttingen

No. 33, *The Hymn Book* (Red)

Come O Jesus

Come O Jesus, stand among us
Gathered in your name today.
Let your word to us be spoken
Here in new and daring ways.
Open us to new perceptions:
touch our hearts and stretch our minds.
Help us recognize your spirit
Blowing fresh on humankind.

Come O Jesus, walk beside us.
Strengthen us and calm our fear.
In our world the shadows deepen:
evil's storms seem very near.
When we doubt and tire and falter,
Overcome by pain and strife,
Waken us to sense your presence
At the very heart of life.

Come O Jesus, go before us
To the corners of the earth,
Binding wounds and healing sorrows,
Spreading love and joy and worth.
Give us insight and compassion.
Keep our motives pure and true,
May our lives be lighted beacons
Leading others straight to you.

Judy Fetter

Tune: Hyfrydol

No. 49, *The Hymn Book* (Red)

Information: Africa

For current information about the struggles in South Africa, write Wendy Hunt, Africa Desk, Division of World Outreach, 85 St. Clair Ave. E., Toronto, ON M4T 1M8. Ask for the *SAEP* (South Africa Education Project) *Newsletter*. The resource is free; contributions are accepted.

MacPhail

Watch for the premiere of *MacPhail*, a one-woman documentary play by Theresa Sears and David Switzer. Diane Gordon will portray Agnes MacPhail.

If you are interested in knowing when the play will be in your area, contact Grapevine Productions, 67A Portland St., Toronto, ON M5V 2M9 (Tel: 416 - 979-9529).

Judy Fetter lives in Victoria, BC, where she is chairperson of Resources for the British Columbia Conference UCW. A mother of four and grandmother of four, she writes weekly for the local church bulletin on the lectionary selections. Her spouse, the Rev. Lawrence Fetter, is minister of Metropolitan United Church in Victoria.

COMING

Fall Issue of Women's Concerns

Women and the Economy

Workshop on Abortion

by Alyson Huntly

On January 28, 1985, Trinity-St. Paul's United Church in Toronto hosted a forum to present and discuss the United Church's official position on abortion. With the Toronto clinic continuing to operate amidst a furor of support and opposition and within the context of mounting controversy across the country, the United Church position is particularly significant. It attempts to provide, in the words of Ruth Evans of the Division of Mission in Canada, "a theologically sound middle ground". And yet, the position is not well known, nor has it contributed as much as it should have to the public debate.

The United Church stand, first adopted in 1971, was reaffirmed at the 1984 General Council, along with the recommendation that it be given more publicity. The position, the result of a six-year process of study and consultation, obviously does not reflect the thoughts or feelings of every United Church member. But it does respect a variety of points of view, affirming other positions as having theological integrity.

The official church position is NOT pro-abortion. It maintains that abortion must always be seen as the lesser of two evils, and "should be the most responsible alternative available in each particular situation". The position IS pro-choice, in the sense of affirming the right of women, as responsible moral agents, to make decisions about their lives. It holds that until the point where abortion can no longer be performed by a D&C suction, abortion should be a personal matter between a woman and her doctor. The United Church calls for an end to the hospital committee system, the removal from the Criminal Code of all sections related to abortions performed up to 20 weeks, and the provision of adequate medical, counselling and contraceptive services.

The United Church position comes out of the basic Protestant perspective that as human beings we have "come of age". We are responsible before God, and as partners with God, for our own lives and for the world. This responsibility sometimes involves grave decisions. We are seldom presented with easy answers. Issues do not always break down into tidy categories. We must tread our way prayerfully and carefully. "Life in this imperfect world often places us in complex circumstances of moral dilemma and ambiguity where values, ultimate in themselves, seem at times to be in conflict with other values and rights."

In considering the issue of abortion there are no clear answers. The fetus is a unique, valuable, developing form of life. Yet, its value, precious as it is, must be weighed against other issues. The United Church statement says in part, "Each of us is called upon in a

freedom that is given by God and within the context of the community of faith to make responsible decisions, even when choosing between two wrongs".

The United Church has concluded that all taking of life brutalizes, and yet the fetus does not have pre-emptive value.

Abortion may in some situations be the lesser of two evils, and so it is the responsibility of the woman herself to make careful decisions about an unwanted pregnancy "through a free and responsive exercise of her conscience". She should not have to face that decision alone. Hopefully, others involved in the situation should be part of that process. But she, not society, nor a committee of doctors who have never met her, has the right to choose.

Carolyn Egan, a Toronto birth-control counsellor, participated in the Trinity-St. Paul's forum. She stressed that abortion should never be seen as a method of birth control, but that the vast majority of women seeking abortion do so because of the failure of the birth-control method they were using. Egan stressed that, in her experience, women do not make frivolous choices. In a world without adequate economic or social support systems, many are forced by circumstance to choose abortions.

The issue is not a failure on the part of women to be responsible about their sexuality. A high percentage of women seeking abortions are poor, rural, or immigrant. They come to the cities because of lack of access in their own communities. One third of communities in Canada are not serviced by hospitals that provide abortions.

Egan pointed out that the current law in Canada, which has existed since 1969, makes abortion legal when approved by a committee of an accredited institution. The current debate is not over legality or morality but over access. The access which exists is a privileged one, giving preference to upper- and middle-income women — women who know how the system works, have private gynaecologists, etc. The struggle to legalize independent abortion clinics is an attempt to give the disadvantaged the same access to choice as the privileged.

The federal government has called the present system inequitable. The clinic at the Toronto General Hospital, which is public and funded by OHIP, gets 75 calls a day for six appointments. The result of such inequity has been a fight to make abortion available to all women who choose it. The hospital committee system creates a considerable time bind. The average wait for a woman who has decided to have an abortion is eight weeks! The United Church maintains that a fetus has increasing value as time progresses because of the theological

significance in both the process of growing development and the developing human relationships. Obviously then, if abortion is to take place, it should happen as early as possible.

One of the issues raised by the Trinity-St. Paul's event was how to reconcile the United Church's position on abortion with its stand on capital punishment or disarmament. As people of God we are called to "choose life". To attempt to do so, as anyone who has wrestled with any of these issues will know, is to be thrust into the midst of complexity and moral ambiguity.

One clear solution is to assert that human life begins at the point of conception. Roger Hutchinson, United Church theologian and ethicist, was also a participant in the Trinity-St. Paul's event. As he points out, we must ask the question "Why should we choose this point in time over another?" Why not prior to conception — this would lead to a condemnation not only of abortion but also contraception.

Another point of view, that was held until the mid-1880s, was that life began at "ensoulment" — the point at which the soul entered the developing fetus. This was thought to take place at 40 days for males or 80 days for females!. However, if one does believe that life begins at conception, then abortion could only be justified, if at all, on therapeutic grounds. That is not the position of the United Church, since we believe that "our concern must not be limited to a concern for the unborn; it must also include a concern for the quality of life as a whole."

If one holds the United Church's position, of unique and increasing value, then the question becomes one of how to best preserve the sanctity of life. It is a matter of discerning, within each situation, what choice is most life-giving and life-affirming for those concerned. Roger Hutchinson summarized his participation in the forum by saying that to force a woman to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term can lead to a devaluing of human life. "Abortion hasn't led to the disparaging of human life or of pregnancy in general," he said. "I believe that freedom to choose will lead to an increasing responsibility for developing human life."

The United Church is a varied and diverse institution. The church's statement respects this diversity. "Within our community, strong differences of opinion are our strength not our weakness." On difficult issues such as abortion, it is important for each of us to carefully reflect on, and consider, our own stance, in light of our faith and experience. The following real-life case studies, and the questions which accompany them, may

help you to clarify your own position in relation to the one adopted by the church.

Case Study One

Karen is 16 years old, and has just discovered that she is pregnant. She has no means of economic support and says that her parents would disown her if they discovered that she was pregnant. Her boyfriend, who is 18, is pressuring her to have an abortion. She feels certain that if she goes ahead and has the child, he will have nothing more to do with her. "It would be the end of it," she says. She feels that abortion is morally wrong, yet she also knows that she would not emotionally be able to give up a child once it was born. "I was adopted myself, and I just don't think I could do that." She is wondering if she could raise the child herself.

Questions

1. What feelings does this situation raise for you?
2. How would you try to help or support Karen in the process of coming to a decision?
3. What insight does your faith offer you, in considering this situation?

Case Study Two

Asha is a 22-year-old immigrant. Her pregnancy came as a great shock to her because "I was on the pill and I always thought that was 100 percent safe." Her status as a sponsored immigrant would be threatened by her pregnancy and "there is no way I can return to my family." She has decided to have an abortion, "even though I know it is wrong, I don't feel I have any other choice." She has asked you to support her through that process.

Questions

1. Will you agree to Asha's request for support? What kind of support will you give her?
2. What questions does this situation raise for you?
3. How do you feel your faith calls you to respond in this situation?

Case Study Three

Janice is 42 years old. Her youngest child has recently turned 16. Janice has just completed three years of education and was about to embark on a new career when she found out she was pregnant. "I thought I was finally free to pursue some things I have been waiting for all the time I was home with the children. I can't face the thought of having another child. I think it would destroy me. Besides, with the children just entering university, we really need a second income." Janice and her husband are in the process of trying to reach a decision.

Resources

Questions

1. How do you feel about the different options open to Janice?
2. What support would you want to offer Janice and her husband in this situation?
3. What would you hope for Janice?

The following statements and questions, along with the preceding case studies, provide a suggested workshop outline for discussing abortion.

1. Criminal Code of Canada

(excerpts from section 251)

Procuring a miscarriage in Canada is an offence liable to imprisonment for life, except

— when performed in good faith by a qualified medical practitioner in an accredited or approved hospital, and
— when “the therapeutic abortion committee for that accredited or approved hospital, by a majority of the members of the committee and at a meeting of the committee at which the case of such female person has been reviewed,

(c) has by certificate in writing stated that in its opinion the continuation of the pregnancy of such female person would or would likely endanger her life or health, and
(d) has caused a copy of such certificate to be given to the qualified medical practitioner.”

2. The United Church of Canada, while not accepting “abortion on demand”, has stated that “abortion is a moral issue and can only be accepted as the lesser of two evils and should be the most responsible alternative available in each particular situation.” It therefore “urges the Government of Canada to remove from the Criminal Code all sections presently relating to abortion to the extent that they relate to termination of pregnancy within the first twenty weeks.” It “urges provincial governments to provide facilities and personnel necessary to meet the need for abortions, and make known the availability of such facilities, and require all hospitals to declare publicly their policy on abortion.”

3. The United Church of Canada position calls for the abolition of the committee system and making abortion in the first twelve weeks a choice between a woman and her doctor.

- (a) Do you support this viewpoint?
- (b) What modifications would you make in it?
- (c) How does your discussion of the three case histories affect your understanding of this issue?

by **Norah McMurtry**

Faithful Reflections on Our Experience

Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada

77 Charles St. W., Toronto, ON M5S 1K5

Available from CANEC, \$3.50

“O God, Mother and Father of all, I give you thanks for your gift of a human being to reveal your love. Especially I respond to your care and respect for women. For giving us ourselves as persons of worth and power...power to confront injustice, poverty and despair, and enabling us to give our gifts of nurturing and caring to those with whom we come in contact. Forgive me when I fail and give up. May your Holy Spirit awaken me again with her voice calling me to go, act and live. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.”

Frankie Tillman

Vancouver, BC

This prayer is from a collection of 24 devotional readings written by women from across Canada. The writers are both lay and ordained, from various spiritual backgrounds, and all draw on their daily experiences. Each devotion consists of a scripture passage, a reflection and a prayer. It is a useful resource for both individual and group reflection and an important contribution to the spiritual growth of Canadian women.

The booklet is written in both English and French.

Views From the Intersection. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, and Catherine Barry.

New York: Crossroad, 1984.

Letters for God's Name. Gail Ramshaw-Schmidt.

Minneapolis: The Seabury Press, 1984.

Reviewed by Elizabeth Macdonald

Christian faith can and often does nourish many dimensions of our life, satisfying various emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual needs and desires. Of all our yearnings, our spiritual yearnings are among the strongest and deepest — and the most difficult to satisfy. This is especially true for many Christian women today, myself included. As I have been excited by feminist theology and biblical interpretation, as I have been profoundly moved by inclusive words and actions in corporate worship, I have become increasingly aware of my own yearning to grow in my spirituality as I have grown in other areas of my faith; simply put: to pray. But how do you pray with feminist consciousness?

Is it possible, once you are aware of the male language, male imagery, male concepts that so permeate Western spirituality, ignoring or rejecting women's experience? How do you live with the pain and frustration of not knowing how to pray?

Fortunately, for us all, resources on prayer and spirituality from a feminist perspective are emerging. One such resource is *Views From the Intersection*, a book of poems and meditations written by two self-described Christian feminists. Catherine Barry, an American Roman Catholic, writes powerful poetry that is mystical while at the same time clearly grounded in concrete daily experience. The accompanying meditations are sensitively and concisely written by Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, an American Protestant known to many already for her excellent book on female biblical imagery of God, entitled *The Divine Feminine*. (See Review in March 1984 *Women's Concerns*.)

The title, *Views From the Intersection*, is drawn from a T.S. Elliot poem that speaks of the point of intersection of the timeless with time. The poems and meditations approach the intersection by raising up what is ordinary in life, and recognizing it as holy, thereby offering new ways to image and understand God, ourselves and the world around us. As I read through and reflected upon *Views From the Intersection*, I found elements of my own experience expressed and certain feelings named and articulated in ways I have found hard to express. Wonderful new imagery of God did indeed open up more room for me to experience God. In the book's introduction, Virginia Mollenkott writes:

It is our hope that reading *Views* will do more than provide insights about Christian feminist spirituality and twentieth-century mysticism, though it should certainly do both. We hope that our readers will be stimulated again and again to open themselves to their personal birthright: direct experience of God at the intersection of the timeless with time.

One of the most moving pieces in the book focussed on the relationship between mother and child. Catherine Barry wrote "For Joan Her First Time".

To have a child is at last
To chart with certainty
The tracking of plush monsters
In the kitchen.
To take responsibility
For the secret life of poodles.
This time round to hear
Why things squeak in the night,
To smell why birds fly,
And see why wet is not dry.

Lovely to know for sure at last.
Only one small catch:
Children tell and cannot know;
Their mothers know and cannot tell.

In her comments Virginia Mollenkott wrote:

"The mother thinks she knows with certainty the underlying rationale for things that were only face-value in her childhood: sounds in the night, birds flying, wetness as opposed to dryness. But human limitation reasserts itself, for when the mother actually tries to explain the things she is so sure she understands, she cannot do so.

"For all that we adults think we know, there remains an ineluctable mystery behind even the most commonplace realities. We can let ourselves be frustrated by this mystery, or we can rejoice in it. But one thing is certain: we must live with it."

I recommend *Views From the Intersection* as a book for private meditation and/or a resource for a prayer group.

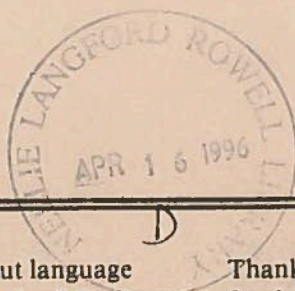
For any who are concerned about the ways in which we speak of God in both our prayer and worship lives, *Letters for God's Name* is a must. It is a highly imaginative "abecedary" that goes through the alphabet basing a name for God and an evocative reflection on each letter. These names for God grow out of both biblical imagery and women's experience.

Gail Ramshaw-Schmidt, an American Lutheran, whose background is literature and whose interest is liturgy, has been at the forefront of language renewal and revision in the church. She does include some traditional male imagery (F is for Father, D is for David, S is for Stronghold), but she does not merely defend these names, she challenges them with the difficult questions many of us are asking today. About the letter F she writes:

F is a risky letter...It stands on only one small point and is so top-heavy that all too easily it pitches over and lands crestfallen on its open face. Only by careful attention to posture can an F stand balanced. F is for father.

She also draws extensively on women's own experience. Under the letter H, naming God as Health, she describes women waiting in a gynecologist's office, waiting for health. I found it deeply moving and very real. Not all of her letter-names for God are gender-related. She invites the reader to image God as Bath, Oboe, Volcano and much more.

Letters for God's Name is stimulating for individual prayer and is excellent for prayer or study groups. It is



also a useful resource for any concerned about language in worship and looking for new ways to speak of God.

The Words We Sing: An Inclusive Language Guide to The Hymn Book.

The Working Unit on Worship and Liturgy, Division of Mission in Canada, 1984. Available from CANEC, \$2.25.

This booklet was written out of a concern about gender-exclusive language. Its purpose is to provide congregations with a tool for dealing with *The Hymn Book*. It contains a rationale, a workshop model for use in congregations, an inclusive language guide to *The Hymn Book* and some examples of revised hymns. In addition there is a resource list and some advice about copyright.

Abortion: Stories from North and South,
written and directed by Gail Singer. (54 minutes, 50 seconds)

Available from the National Film Board of Canada

This film "is a cross-cultural survey of the realities of abortion. It shows how abortion transcends race, religion and social class, and how differences in the practice and perception of abortion are mainly in the degree of secrecy and danger accompanying it. It is a film about woman's right to safe medical care." It was filmed in Ireland, Japan, Thailand, Peru, Colombia and Canada.

Letters to the Editorial Committee

The special March, 1985 issue of *Women's Concerns* spurred me to thinking of how I personally, and how my church can respond to the issues.

I have followed some of the suggestions and I have also forwarded a copy of this issue to our social action committee. They had previously done a seminar evening on pornography which was well attended by church and community people. Our church membership also had an opportunity recently to express their views on sexual orientation and eligibility for the order of ministry. This issue of *Women's Concerns* will be encouraging and inspiring for the social action members.

Thanks to Mary Thompson Boyd for providing much food for thought and action, and suggestions for implementation.

I always look forward to the *Women's Concerns*. My faith and my work are reflected in its pages.

Sincerely,
Ella Fowler, Toronto, ON

P.S.

...this is the kind of synopsis that should go to all women's groups in the United Church. We need to know what is happening in our church, and how we can be a part of the action.

Members of the Committee on Women in Church and Society of The Presbyterian Church of New Zealand would appreciate receiving issues of your magazine. We are about to circulate a modest newsletter and are keen to gather ideas about content and format.

Shalom,
Nola Ker, New Zealand

I have had the opportunity to read through a friend's copies of *Women's Concerns*, Oct. '84 and March '85, and would like to receive the publication.

I am a feminist who is trying to see where "traditional organized religion" can fit into my life and I believe that your publication can clarify some concerns I have.

Kathy Running, Kingston, ON

I recently saw your March issue of *Women's Concerns* and found the articles interesting. I live in a northern community in Newfoundland and consequently am often isolated from issues, and networks of women. I'd be very pleased if you could send me a copy of the March issue and place me on your mailing list. Keep up the good work!

Margaret Ollerhead, St. Anthony, NF

Mary Thompson Boyd's work in this last issue of *Women's Concerns* (my first issue) is marvellous. I am thrilled to see what you've listed for readings.

Please put me on the mailing list for *Women's Concerns*. And could you send four copies of Issue 28 to me?

Thank you for your work — such valuable useful work!
Sincerely,
Pat Brennan Alpert, Antigonish, NS