

# WOMEN, EQUALITY, AND PRIESTHOOD— SOFT ANSWERS TO HARD QUESTIONS

*When my daughter was about four years old, she stood up on the pew during a baby blessing, looked at the circle of men surrounding a tiny baby, and demanded (loudly), “Hey, where are the mommies?” Sooner or later, or sooner and later, most Mormon women ask questions about the nature of priesthood authority and women’s*

*relationship to it. The following essays approach these questions from different vantage points and arrive at different answers and, more importantly, at new and different questions. They invite us to see old questions in a new light, to reconsider our own answers, and to appreciate the searching of our sisters.* —K.H.

## A NECESSARY TENSION

by Ashley Sanders



*In the event that she completes an online jogging class, ASHLEY SANDERS will graduate from BYU with a degree in philosophy and English. Besides being able to think abstractly while running long distances, Ashley hopes her education will land her a job as an English professor. In the meantime, she agonizes over urban sprawl and holds weekly discussion nights with friends.*

**I**N THE JUNE 2007 *SUNSTONE*, MARGARET TOSCANO listed five questions that need answering before determining whether boys are more important than girls in the LDS Church. Amidst Toscano’s “how,” “where,” “what,” and “why” questions, there is a “who” question: “Is gender equality in the Church to be measured objectively by outward criteria or subjectively by the feelings reported by LDS women?” This is an important question, since insiders and outsiders rarely agree, and since the answer to the question is important to individual happiness. To answer the “who” question, it might be helpful to examine the question of inequality in the context of another religion and then apply the analogous parts to our own. To do that, I will use an example from Deepa Mehta’s film, *Water*.

The film follows the life of Hindu women living in widow houses called ashrams. Many Hindu women are married off at very young ages, frequently to older, Brahmin men. When the husbands die, Hindu beliefs dictate that widows leave their families, don white saris, abstain from certain foods, and live off the alms of others.

The film seems to suggest that social prisons need no keys—that ashrams stay full without guards or locks. From a secular or outsider perspective, these ashrams seem profoundly unjust. Without the explanations and expectations of a religious perspective, it appears that women are being forced to prop up the caste system by getting married to men who die

and leave them to suffer the unfair consequences. Any secular analysis of the situation would conclude that the women are being degraded to reinforce a system in which males profit at the expense of others.

One of the main characters—a Hindu skeptic who has recently returned from school—points this out, and then offers the solution: *Any scripture that requires or promotes injustice is not scripture and should not be followed.* Easy for him to say. He is a secularist; he has separated himself from Hinduism because of its injustices. He is not bound by the powerful circular arguments, scriptures, and social fallout that would accompany his opinion were he still a practicing Hindu.

The widow woman he loves, and who loves him back (a sin for widows), sees it differently. She is still inside Hinduism though she sees its injustices. Her situation is different because she believes in Hinduism enough to recognize that religions operate differently than other institutions. She believes enough to understand that if there is even a chance that Hinduism is true—including all its necessary or inspired injustices—that it would be a mistake to treat it like a rationalist democracy. Not only that, but she would risk everything if she doubted it.

And what is the point of our analogy? The point is that a person who believes in something even partially—or, worse, who is wondering whether or not she believes it—finds herself trapped between the discourse of the insiders and the criticism of the outsiders, and she must somehow consider both without forgetting that the consequences of being wrong are terrifying.

This is problematic, since the two discourses not only disagree but tout entirely different methodologies. Outsider discourse might conclude, for instance, that women do not appear to be equal in Hinduism, and that the stringent rules applied to widows seem designed to secure a power structure that favors men. A religious apologist might respond in one of several ways:

1. That the perceived inequality is a test of faith, and that faith in Hinduism means ignoring the ethical implications of a commandment in order to love and obey the true religion (the true religion being something apart from and above the ethical question of injustice).

2. That the gods have dictated these (possibly unfair) structures, and that the gods are either always right or else so unknowable that we cannot scan or judge their reasons.
3. That obedience is more important than ethics, and that faith is irrational.
4. That it may really *be* flawed and ungodly, but that most people in the religion could not handle repairing the flaw and therefore the religion must cater to them.

I will respond with secular counterpoints in a moment, but first I want to illustrate the power of the above arguments, even when they are presented to women to reinforce their inferior status.

*A person who is wondering whether or not she believes something finds herself trapped between the discourse of the insiders and the criticism of the outsiders, and she must somehow consider both without forgetting that the consequences of being wrong are terrifying.*

In the film, a young girl joins the ashram. She is bold and brash and not yet conditioned to accept what others consider to be religious fact. She is one day sitting among a group of ashram women while a priest expounds from scripture—scripture that, ironically, proclaims the inferiority of women. The widows listen raptly, or at least dutifully, ready to accept the claims of authority. The young girl will have none of it, however, and interrupts the priest to ask, outright, why women have no power.

The odd thing is that the priest does not even need to respond; he does not have to punish, censure, explain or dis-

cuss. The women respond for him. They look terrified and shush the girl. The *women* respond! The very same women who were forced to marry certain men; the same women who had no choice in the matter; the same women who were sent to the ashram and separated from their families; the same women who cannot leave; the same women who cannot eat certain foods; the same women who must beg for money; the same women who must become prostitutes when their begging doesn't bring in enough.

And why? There are innumerable possible answers. The point is that the women, voluntarily, stay where they are put. The ashram is not locked; there is no guard. They stay because they love something enough to accept its injustices; they stay

because they believe in irrational, unknowable gods, and they fear the dread consequence of rationality; they stay because they are afraid of what they will be called if they leave; they stay because there are a thousand-thousand explanations for why things are the way they are, and because these explanations never satisfy but insist, flatly, that there is no way to investigate them without challenging them utterly. They stay because there is no method for questioning the system while staying inside of it, because all the virtues in their religion are manufactured to reward staying and disparage leaving.

**T**HIS IS WHY I do not believe we can judge equality in Mormonism by asking its insiders. I believe that the discussion of equality is an inherently comparative activity: It is a comparison between two discourses that check and judge another—two discourses that will never entirely agree or even speak the same language. Equality invokes mathematics, which reminds us that an equation must have two sides. In this case, those sides are represented by secular ethics and religious circularity. Neither one can have primacy and satisfy the other, but I do think they should trouble each other.

A secular ethicist would have some hard responses to the religious explanations for earthly injustice mentioned above. To explanation 1, she would ask what “pure” religion would look like if taken separately from its structures, commandments, and practices, and if one shouldn't decide whether one believes in the former partly by referencing the latter. For explanation 2, she would reject the disconnect between authority and ethics and deplore the idea of an unknowable God. Believing that way, she would argue, you could believe in anything, and religion is obviously not about believing in anything but in adjudicating belief. She would expand the argument to contest explanation 3, insisting that there must be reasons for believing everything, and especially for deciding what to be-



JONNY HAWKINS

*“I think I’m about to reach my breaking point”*

lieve—particularly when it concerns ethics, which is necessarily a world of reason and sharable discourse. Explanation 4 would also exasperate her, as it would appear to confuse the purpose of religion with its means.

To be fair, the religious person would have some good arguments against the secular ethicist, too. But that is not my reason for writing here. My main point is that insider opinion, although necessary, is not enough when determining questions of inequality. It is not enough for several reasons, some of which I have already mentioned.

1. It is not enough because equality is an inherently comparative term. Since evaluating equality is an ethical task, and since ethics is partly a question of representation, determining equality requires comparing the representation standards of one system with the representation standards of another.
2. It is not enough because public and private speaking is different. When a minority speaks to a majority to demand or even merely consider the question of equality, that minority must tailor its message to the accepted terms and speaking patterns of the majority. They must conform to these in hopes of getting a subversive message across to an institution that has a vested interest in limiting subversion. Thus, even those women who might negatively evaluate their position in the Church will mainly do so in accordance with accepted terms and positions.
3. Most insiders have to overcome a tremendous amount of inertia before they will apply to the institutions they love the same rigorous analyses they apply to other institutions. While this love might be instructive and vital to clearly understanding things, it must be balanced by evaluations from people who are not influenced by the social and cultural expectations that govern the inside.
4. Because religion frequently validates its claims by reference either to itself or to a God who does not follow human logic or timing, it leaves dissatisfied members little to cite but their consciences, and apologists with only anecdotes and positive personal stories. While claims of this type have a valid place, we must allow for the structural and historical critiques that are more readily shouldered by outsiders, recognizing that humane actions within a system do not necessarily imply a humane system.

For these reasons, I believe the ashram analogy is helpful; it helps us to determine if the question of inequality within the LDS Church resembles what I have called the prison that needs no keys. Without the helpful and necessary tension between insider and outsider methodologies, the system could easily remain a prison in which the inertia of allegiance would function as lock and key, with insiders voluntarily staying inside. I think that the question of equality is built on a more revealing riddle: why insiders in one institution defend practices and structures that they would condemn in another. I think we need both sides of the equality debate to start to have that discussion. ☺

## WHY DO WE NEED EACH OTHER?

### *A Personal Search for the Answer to God's Odd Juxtaposing of Male and Female*

by Tracie A. Lamb



TRACIE A. LAMB has published several essays, as well as *Yearning for the Living God*, the memoirs of her mission president, F. Enzo Busche (*Deseret Book*, 2004), which she compiled and edited. She and her family are living and working in New Zealand for a year.

QUESTIONS ABOUT MALE AND FEMALE ROLES have always been part of my life. I distinctly remember one day in elementary school when I was playing basketball. I was thinking about being a “Mrs.” someday, and I decided, “I don’t want to just be an ‘s’ in a man’s name.” The struggles and questions have continued since then.

I write to answer my own questions. Some of the most significant questions in my life concern this enigma of male and female. Are we different or just treated differently? What are our respective roles? Why do we have different roles? What do I want my role to be? Do I have a choice? Where do relationships fit in? Do we even need relationships? Why? Why? Why?

I have been married in the temple, divorced, single for six years, and married again. With this new marriage, I am at a more contented place than I have ever been regarding male/female questions. That contentment is also due to having worked through a significant part of the gender question I have as a Mormon woman: What is the priesthood and what, as a woman, is my relationship to it? To put it more bluntly: Why do men get the priesthood and I don’t?

In this essay, I venture a public mulling over of this personal question. I realize that the topic is a controversial one and that many, if not most, may disagree with my conclusions. Nevertheless, I invite you to witness my journey with this question and how I resolved it for myself.

ALTHOUGH I AM from a very small, rural Utah town—backward even today—I was imbued with the feminist spirit of the ‘60s and ‘70s. I also think I was born with more than just a little independence and assertiveness. My patriarchal blessing says I was designed that way: “You have been designed as a leader among your sex,” it says. I took some comfort from those words when I so obviously didn’t fit in with BYU culture or in homemaking meetings.

But that aside, because of the era I grew up in, I was primed early to be a feminist. I was on the cutting edge of the women’s

movement in my town, where I helped break the stereotype barrier by becoming the town's first female gas station attendant. The fact that I was often mistaken for a boy because of my short hair and much-less-than-satisfactory shape was just one of the hazards of pushing the envelope. I was, nevertheless, proud of my effort on behalf of all women.

I was quite a feminist from early on, and though I was also quite devout, that devotion did not keep me from being rankled by the fact that I could not hold the priesthood. I could never understand why some boys and, later, men who seemed so less capable than I were given positions and authority simply because of their physical makeup. I often thought to myself back then, "Men want to lead, but they can't even dance." It was a time of great frustration and questioning for me.

In my growing-up, feminist world, I believed that boys and girls are similar—that the apparent differences come from acculturation and environment. I believed that men and women are just people, basically the same. I was wrong. Boys and girls, men and women are different. I realize there is a continuum of characteristics, and I know each individual comes with her or his own set of qualities. Yet, from my own experience, observation, and searching, I believe some qualities are generally female and some are generally male. For a while, it has been politically incorrect to assert that belief. But more and more, people are acknowledging the differences and trying to understand what they mean.

For example, an article in *Parents* magazine, "Teaching Boys, Teaching Girls," discusses the different learning styles of boys and girls and offers suggestions to parents for working with the strengths and weaknesses of each sex. Little girls, the article contends, develop earlier, have better fine motor skills, and have stronger verbal skills and reading ability. On the other hand, they typically have an aversion to risk and are less adventuresome and techno-savvy than boys. Little boys have stronger spatial skills and are more self-reliant and competitive, but they may lack verbal ability and are often restless and need more physical activity than girls. The article suggests that parents can help their boy or girl by understanding the possible strengths and weaknesses for each sex and using that knowledge to guide their child.<sup>1</sup>

Such articles would have been considered heresy by many people only a short while ago and still are by some, but now experts are coming to believe what those who deal with children already know—boys and girls are different in many ways. I hadn't understood that for a variety of reasons.

Perhaps part of my difficulty came from something I realized recently when I was playing Barbies with my youngest daughter. As a girl, I used to play Barbies a lot. My sister and I each had a Barbie, and my cousins had Barbies. We got lots of Barbie clothes at Christmas. But none of us ever owned a Ken doll. There was no Ken in my young life. Perhaps that is significant.

Deep inside, I had a fear, distrust, and general dismissal of males. I did not see them as people. In my ignorance and to my current shame, I used to believe that men did not have

feelings, so it did not matter what I said or did to them. Only in the last few years have I begun to question that premise and wonder where it came from. Perhaps my assumptions came from the incident when an older male relative felt me up, but I called him on it and he never did it again. Or from the rows of high school boys lined up jauntily, one foot against the wall, hands in pockets, smirking, making comments and catcalls as girls walked by. Maybe it was fed by the myriad news stories about horrendous crimes, almost invariably committed by young men. For whatever reasons, I was nervous and defensive in the presence of the adolescent male.

**M**Y FEAR OF men ran deep, but a time came in my life when I decided to face that fear. It was an interesting moment of enlightenment. I have the habit of hanging quotations on my kitchen cabinets, partly because I enjoy them but mostly to help fill up my two daughters with good every day. The saying one week was from Madame Curie, "Nothing is to be feared. It is only to be understood." In one of those rare flashes of insight, I realized that maybe one way to overcome my fear of males was to understand them better.

I started my search with the book, *A Fine Young Man*, by Michael Gurian, which had been recommended by a good friend who has three boys. In second grade, I had gotten my first pair of glasses. Until then, I had been unaware that my eyesight was so poor except that I kept getting bad headaches. I remember very clearly putting on those glasses and being able to see objects that I had never before realized were there. Reading Gurian's book was a similar experience. I hadn't realized I had been so blind to who and what males are. Reading his observations and insights helped me see and understand what I had never seen or understood. It was like seeing words on the blackboard at school for the very first time.

One thing Gurian explains is the incredible impact biology plays in boys' lives. In fact, possibly the point that helped me most was the information about testosterone. Gurian states, "So much of how an adolescent boy lives depends on his hormones, especially his testosterone, the human sex and aggression hormone that makes him into an adult male."<sup>2</sup>

A *New York Times Magazine* article further explains the significant effects of this powerful hormone. The article, titled "The He Hormone," concludes that testosterone levels are major reasons for the differences in men and women and gives these statistics: "An average woman has 40 to 60 nanograms of testosterone in a deciliter of blood plasma. An average man has 300 to 1000, and a teenage boy can range up to 1300 or so."<sup>3</sup> Gurian states in his book, "Adolescent males (pubescent, post pubescent, and then continuing into adulthood) secrete between five and seven surges of this hormone through their bodies each day. By late adolescence, their testosterone levels can be as much as twenty times that of their female peers."<sup>4</sup> After learning that, I became much more sympathetic to teenage boys. Having myself experienced the monthly heightened awareness of and desire for the opposite sex caused by hormonal fluctuation, I was flabbergasted to realize boys experience that feeling not only daily but many times a day. That

boys are at such mercy to their biologies engendered in me a great deal more sympathy and understanding for them than I hitherto had.

It is not just testosterone that makes males and females different, however. Even our brains work differently. For some functions, we process the same information in different parts of our brains. And for some thought processes, women use most of their brains while men use only a part. Women think in the big picture. What affects one part of a woman's life affects every part of her life.

For example, I have always been grateful I got my degree before I had children. The intense concentration and lack of awareness of the outside world or the passing time as I sat in my carrel pouring over books would have been impossible with children. Once I had a child, I was never able to entirely focus on anything else again. A part of my brain is always occupied in thinking about my children.

Men, on the other hand, tend to compartmentalize more easily and can concentrate on one thing to the exclusion of all else. My friend, for example, was telling about what her husband is like on trips. He is completely focused on the destination—getting to point B—and does not want to be distracted by diversions along the way.

I believe that another difference between the sexes is that it is more difficult for males to mature than for females. Having a baby matures a woman, and once she becomes pregnant, she grows up pretty fast. A man's path to maturity is not as clear, direct, or certain. This fact may be one reason for an observation of Margaret Thatcher's reported in the memoirs of Barbara Bush. Pierre Trudeau, the prime minister of Canada, once acted rudely towards Thatcher. When President Reagan expressed chagrin over the prime minister's behavior, Thatcher replied, "Don't worry. We women are used to men who don't mature."<sup>5</sup>

Gurian's book elaborates ways to help boys mature and the types of support they often need to contain their natural impulses and move from the uncontrolled, immature boy to the disciplined, mature man. The book emphasizes that boys need a great deal of structure and outside discipline. Because of this insight, I have begun to understand and appreciate organizations such as the Army and the necessity of the high level of discipline and training they employ.

After he finished basic training, my brother described an incident where a group of trainees wearing gas masks were put into a building filled with tear gas. Then they were ordered to remove their gas masks. He described the pain and physical indignity of the experience—some soiled themselves, and others vomited; tears and mucus streamed

down their faces as they were forced to remain in the building for a set period of time.

My brother explained the purpose of the exercise: to break down their former selves so that they could be rebuilt as soldiers willing to follow orders and obey commands. I was horrified at the time, but now I see how such extreme measures may be necessary in order to have cocky, arrogant adolescent males become respectful, disciplined men. I realize that not all young men are cocky. However, it does seem that such extreme discipline may be necessary. Such an exercise would be emotionally destructive for most women, I think, but perhaps it is necessary to get the attention of men.

Gurian's book further explains the need most boys have for regimentation and structure. It describes various stages of the male maturation process and explains that when a boy has almost reached physical maturity, it is important that he undertake some sort of quest to help him in the final stages of becoming emotionally mature. The book mentions the vision quests of the Native Americans. It also describes Mormon missions—difficult, highly disciplined assignments where boys are required to give up many pleasures and serve others for two years.

Emphasizing the need to teach boys discipline, Gurian says: "The great lesson adolescent males have taught me is this: There is no such thing as freedom unless it takes place within the limitations of responsibility to higher powers."<sup>6</sup> In their book *The Lessons of History*, Will and Ariel Durant say it this way: "A youth boiling with hormones will wonder why he should not give full freedom to his sexual desires; and if he is unchecked by custom, morals, or laws, he may ruin his life before he matures sufficiently to understand that sex is a river of fire that must be banked and cooled by a hundred restraints if it is not to consume in chaos both the individual and the group."<sup>7</sup>



"Yeah, I know what you mean. I'm a deacon myself."

CALVIN GRONDAHL, SUNDAY'S FEVER

An important element in helping boys to become men is modeling by older males. A phenomenon in the animal kingdom helps illustrate this. A television documentary described an incident involving African elephants. Drought threatened to kill off an entire herd of elephants in a certain area. In an attempt to save at least some of the elephants, park rangers killed the older elephants to give the younger ones a greater chance to survive. Gradually, though, difficulties arose among the young males. They began to form gang-like packs and torment not only other elephants but other animals as well. They became destructive, destroying vegetation and buildings, and even killed other animals for what seemed simply to be the fun of it. Even though most had not reached sexual maturity, they began to display aggressive sexual behavior towards the other elephants, male or female.

The park rangers grew more and more concerned. Was this some kind of illness? Blood samples taken from the young elephants revealed that their testosterone levels were unnaturally high, but what could be done about it? It was suggested that older male elephants be brought from another herd. And it worked. Simply from having the older males around, the testosterone levels of the younger males returned to normal, as did their behavior. A *National Geographic World* article about the incident summed it up this way, “Good adult male role models can help prevent problem behavior in teenagers, be they human or elephant.”<sup>8</sup>

The regimentation, titles, uniforms, and discipline of the military are echoed in the order of the LDS priesthood and programs such as Boy Scouts. The badges, uniforms, awards, and activities assist boys in moving along the path of maturity. As I read more about the needs of the adolescent male, I realized that the priesthood is now set up in a way to fulfill those needs. The developmental stages suggested by Gurian, who is not a Mormon, fit the ages of the Aaronic priesthood quorums. The structure and discipline serve to form, mold, and contain the passions and fulfill many of the needs boys have.

The husband of the friend who recommended Gurian’s book to me told her that he feels boys need the priesthood and directives of the Church to understand that premarital and extramarital sex are absolutely forbidden. He says it has to be unequivocal; otherwise boys and men would struggle even more than they already do in resisting sexual temptation. Those of you who have teenage boys or who have worked with them already know this. I hadn’t, and I didn’t. But gaining a small understanding into how adolescent males tick reduced my anxiety and increased my tolerance. This new insight into the intrinsic, basic differences between males and females casts a completely different light on life.

**S**O I ADMIT we are different, but that niggling question remains—why? I believe that one way these biological differences serve the general well-being is that the incredibly strong sexual urge adolescent males experience helps get their attention away from gadgets, machines, toys, computers, contact sports, motors, and other moving objects.

Their physical drives make them notice girls, which helps them complete their maturation processes. I have heard more than one mother comment that her son finally started paying attention to his hygiene when he discovered girls. Sex alone clearly does not keep a man with a woman, but it is often what initiates the connection in the first place. And it is in this connection—this synergism of unlike parts—that much of the answer to my question lies.

Elena Cotton, a counselor in Kent, Washington, uses the metaphor of a wheel to illustrate this synergism. Women are the center, the hub, she believes, and their spokes reach out to connect with the outside rim, the men. The men are on the outside, making contact “where the rubber meets the road” and acting as liaison with the world.<sup>9</sup>

Cotton suggests that women calm men down enough to allow men the time and space to be introspective and discover what is already inside of them but undeveloped. Unless a man has a particularly nurturing father, she explains, he learns about emotional connection from the women in his life, starting at about age fourteen when he begins to really notice females. She believes there is a place inside of a man that wants to connect emotionally, but often he doesn’t know how to do it. Women, being more naturally connected to their emotions, help men understand or relate to the emotions they have. For example, men rarely have close friends other than their wives. A refrigerator magnet has this wisdom: *Women are women’s best friends. Women are men’s best friends. Without women, there would be no best friends.*

This ability of many women to connect naturally with other people is illustrated in a *Newsweek* article about autism. The article shows a continuum of “empathizing” and “systemizing” and states, “In general, females relate more to feelings, and males to facts. Autistic kids fit in an extreme male pattern.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, autism, in its inability to relate to emotions, is extreme maleness.

Women, who seem more naturally attuned to emotions, can help men connect to theirs. In addition to this (or perhaps because of it), I think women have a civilizing effect on men. I was touched by a letter to my mother from an artist associate of hers, Garth Harrison, which she shared with me. In the letter he says, “I have often stated that, to the extent that the human animal is civilized, it has much to do with the gentle, patient, peaceful and nurturing qualities of many women; that these are not signs of weakness to be exploited but attributes of strength to be honored, respected and protected.” When I was trying to explain my theory about this to a friend, he readily agreed, saying, “You only need to spend some time deer hunting with a bunch of men to know that’s true.” As Robert Frost says in his poem, “Home Burial,”

*A man must partly give up being a man  
With women-folk.*

Because it seemed that having females around was good for males, I felt quite smug about women’s generosity until I had a small epiphany. I was at church watching as the men in our branch stacked chairs and put away tables. Suddenly I realized that men were willing to do women a favor by allowing

women to do the truly important work of caring for children. Men accepted the responsibility of provider so women could have the more significant job of caregiver. I had the feeling the unspoken deal in the preexistence was something like: “You help civilize us, and we’ll do the grunge work.”

LDS discourse states over and over that there is nothing more important than raising children and taking care of the family. I have come to believe this is true not only from hearing Church leaders say as much, but also from another theory of mine. I believe that one way to recognize the will of the Lord is to hold up the mirror of the world to see its opposite. What the world values most is the opposite of what the Lord values. An example is the care of children. An occupation having to do with children is almost always lower in salary than others—teacher, pediatrician, certainly childcare provider. People may pay more to board their dog or park their car than they do to care for their children. By the world’s standards, children are among the very last in importance. But I believe that “the first shall be last and the last shall be first” also applies to children. If caring for and raising little people is as significant as I believe it is, then whoever has the privilege of that responsibility is being given a gift. Traditionally, that has been women.

In my understanding, one of the premises of feminism was that a woman could have it all—a great career and a great family. From my own experience and observation, I have concluded that it is impossible to be a really good mother and a really successful career person. There is no such thing as Superwoman. It seems that many in the feminist movement, instead of teaching the world to value what is female and what women do, encourage women to become like men. A friend who has worked in the corporate world for much of her career said she had to be very masculine at work and that when she was most ineffective at work was when she was most female. I have struggled since childhood with the dilemma of female opportunities and talents being sacrificed to the needs of the family, but I now believe being a good mother is more important than anything else we do.

A basic premise to my thoughts is that there is a God and he has a plan. The Church is the vehicle for that plan. Years ago, I read somewhere that there are three things in life we need. If we have any one of them, we are fortunate—true love, true religion, and true vocation. I have always felt I had my true religion. Next to raising my daughters, my religion has given me the deepest satisfaction in my life. I am a true believer. But that does not mean I am not also a questioner. I have many questions, but I see them as the result of my lack of present ability to understand rather than as flaws in the gospel.

I believe that God’s plan truly includes separate and distinct roles for men and women. At this point in my life, I have come to trust God enough to believe his plan is good and beneficial for us. I know he loves me, and I trust him. I also believe God is a God of order. My friend in the corporate world suggests that any good organization divides its labor. No one person does everything because no one person can. This friend was raised by a single mother and saw how difficult and draining it was to try to be both father and mother. It is unfortunate that

## WHERE IS OUR PART?

JUDITH CURTIS of Phoenix, Arizona, writes:



WHEN the women in Nauvoo told Joseph they wanted to form a benevolent society similar to others of the day, he said he had something better for them:

[T]he Society should move according to the ancient priesthood. . . . [I will] make of this society a kingdom of priests as in Enoch’s day—as in Paul’s day. . . . [I am] glad to have the opportunity of organizing the women, as a part of the priesthood belongs to them.\*

What has become of our part?

IF the Relief Society were restored to quorum status as it was when Joseph set up the organization, women could once again participate in some of the same ways they did then. Even women who say they do not want the priesthood would most likely welcome the following options:

- Mothers could stand in the circle when babies are blessed so they could hear the words of the prayer and feel the spirit there. I don’t believe there are any other Christian churches that do not allow both parents to participate in a baby’s blessing.
- Wives and endowed single women could stand with husbands or other males when children are blessed in the home or family setting.
- Relief Society sisters could lay their hands on and bless one another.
- Women could be witnesses for baptisms, marriages, and sealings. Stake Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary presidents could attend high council meetings and participate directly rather than having to communicate through an intermediate high counselor.

There is nothing on this list that has not been done before. There is nothing that threatens men’s power. I believe most members of the Church would welcome and accept these changes.

\*The first two parts of this quotation are from the 30 March 1842 Nauvoo Relief Society Minutes found in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 110. The third part is quoted E. Howard, “Third Quarterly Conference: Relief Society Salt Lake County,” 7 (1 July 1878), 18.

society has devalued women’s roles, but that does not mean the basic division is wrong. In my theory, as part of the plan, women are allowed the privilege of caring for children in return for what women can teach men.

**B**ESIDES THE PRIVILEGE of having and raising children, do women get anything else out of this bilateral arrangement? Cotton believes they do and provides some insight into this. She explains that men seem to be naturally attuned to their bodies, to the physical. The body and what the body can do is their starting point and the central focus of much of their existence. Women, on the other hand, are often grounded more in the emotional. For good or ill, an emotional thread runs through a woman's life.

Cotton suggests that men help women appreciate the physical side of a relationship and get into the fun of their bodies. For example, girls can learn from boys that they can be tough and that they can be physical. Cotton also believes that although females are nurturers by nature, they also have a masculine, physical side. But they have a need to be connected. When they do something physical—horseback riding, hiking, biking—they generally want to do it with someone.

When I taught the discussions as a missionary, I taught there are two main reasons we come to earth: to practice faith and to get a body. Having a body is one of the most significant aspects of earth life. Because men are so much more physically based, they know more naturally how to really enjoy this gift in many ways. Mary Schmich in her *Chicago Times* column expresses this idea well: “Enjoy your body. Use it every way you can. Don't be afraid of it or of what other people think of it. It's the greatest instrument you'll ever own.”<sup>11</sup> Men can help women do this. For example, one friend told me it was ten years after she got married before she learned to appreciate and enjoy variations on the theme of sex, but now she thinks they're great, and they're like candy to her husband. Another friend says that she has more fun with men. She thinks men help women risk and stretch and get out of their comfort zone.

That men help women connect more with their bodies and appreciate the great gift of their bodies is an idea I had never thought of but can accept. I like it. It makes sense. Women, centered in emotion, help men find and connect to their emotional selves. Men, based primarily in the physical, help women enjoy the gift of their bodies.

One way a man can do this, Cotton believes, is for him to learn to create an emotionally safe environment in order for a woman to get into the fun of her body. She counsels that if a man meets the emotional needs of the primary relationship in his life, he will have all the physical satisfaction he needs. Men often don't take the time, don't allow themselves to be open to their feminine, nurturing side, but women have an innate need to be connected, and they can't enjoy the physical side of the relationship until they feel they are connected emotionally.

**A**S I HAVE come to realize and accept the powerful differences between men and women, my attitude toward men and also toward the priesthood has changed a great deal. I had an interesting experience relating to the priesthood recently. I went to Salt Lake over conference weekend for my mission reunion. That Saturday, a friend and I

went to see the movie at the Joseph Smith Memorial Building. We came out of the movie just a little while before the start of the priesthood session of conference. Men and boys were lining up, many with tickets, many others hoping to get standby tickets. There were thousands and thousands of males of priesthood age.

Surrounded by men in white shirts and ties, we wandered around the new Main Street plaza and outside the Conference Center. It was quite an overwhelming experience, and I tried to identify what exactly I was feeling. It wasn't the negative response I had sometimes had in the past. What I felt, I finally realized, was *safe*. I felt secure surrounded by all those priesthood holders. When the Conference Center opened and they began filing inside, they did seem like an army, and I felt safe there in the midst of them.

My view of the priesthood has changed, and I no longer feel resentful, envious, or threatened by the Church's position that it is to be given only to males. Of course, I still don't really understand what the priesthood is or how I have access to that priesthood power. I just feel that because of the differences of men and women, men have the priesthood because it is how they work and it is what they need. It used to be when my daughters asked why I couldn't give them a blessing or they couldn't pass the sacrament, and I told them because we didn't hold the priesthood, they would ask that inevitable question, “But why can't we hold the priesthood?” I used to say, “I don't know.” Now I say, “Because boys need to hold the priesthood and girls don't,” and I believe it.

I know what some of my feminist friends will say to this. I guess I am no longer an ardent feminist because I do not believe that full equality in ritual and administration is the highest good. I do not believe equality, if it means sameness, is the most important thing. I believe fairness is. I got this idea from something I read in my quest to be a better parent. It said, “Fair is not giving each child the same thing. Fair is giving each child what she needs.” I try to apply this principle in my family. I think it applies to the rest of life as well.

This topic of male and female is as old as yin and yang, and many, perhaps most, already understand it. Though usually a good vicarious learner, I had to go through this process myself to truly understand and come to terms with it. Men and women are different. I have come to believe that the tension of physical male and emotional female is where much of the energy of life lies. Just as one of our lessons on earth is to learn to make of our body and our spirit a pleasing combination, so we, as men and women, need to learn to work in concert, to create the harmony possible when we connect.

The world we've created and have to live in sometimes makes the male/female relationship antagonistic. But the world I think God envisions makes it complimentary—to complete, not compete.

Michael Gurian says, “This is the reality we live in: Girls and boys do not understand each other. We have taught them so little about each other's nature that they don't know how to nurture each other.”<sup>12</sup> That easily applies to most men and women as well. Maybe as we recognize the different avenues

by which we approach our realities, we will be more able to take advantage of one another's strength. Perhaps recognizing the struggles we each face will help us be more caring about one another, regardless of our sex.

Having to live in the day-to-day still muddies the waters sometimes. Nevertheless, I rarely worry anymore about the priesthood and my relationship to it. That issue has been resolved in my own mind enough that I can simply focus on myself and what I need to do to be a better person. As far as men and women are concerned, I believe that our strengths complement one another, that sameness is not fairness, and that differences are not bad. I believe that we need each other to reach our highest potential, to achieve our greatest good. ☺

#### NOTES

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3. Andrew Sullivan, "The He Hormone," *The New York Times Magazine*, 2 April 2000, 46.
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8. "Large and in Charge," *National Geographic World*, May 2001, 6.
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## "IT WAS LIKE COMING HOME" My Call to the Ministry

by Susan Skoor



SUSAN SKOOR is an ordained apostle and member of Community of Christ's Council of Twelve Apostles. When not traveling for her current assignment to the Pacific Field, she lives in Renton, Washington. She and her late husband, John Skoor, are the parents of two grown daughters and one granddaughter.

EDITOR'S NOTE: An early version of this essay was given as part of the panel presentation, "Women in Ministry," at the 2006 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium. Susan Skoor gave a similar address as the keynote speaker at the John Whitmer Historical Association Spring Banquet in Independence, Missouri, on 23 March 2007. That address was published as "Women's Ministries in the Community of Christ: A Personal Reflection," in *The John Whitmer Historical*

*Association Journal*, Vol. 27 (2007): 111–19. Her remarks are published here with the full cooperation of the JWHA.

I AM AN APOSTLE, SERVING ON THE COUNCIL OF Twelve for Community of Christ, once known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS). No one was more surprised than I was when I was called to be an apostle, and I still find myself wondering how it happened and what in the world I think I'm doing. But there it is. I am an apostle. I serve in the Pacific Mission Field, which comprises Alaska, Western Washington and Oregon, Baja California, Australia, French Polynesia, and the Pacific Islands.<sup>1</sup>

I travel within my field preaching, teaching, and providing ministry at seminars, conferences, camps, and retreats. As the chief administrative officer, I supervise the staff and ministers in my field and provide direction, interpretation, and guidance concerning World Church policies, procedures, vision, and goals. In addition, and most important of all, I am an apostolic witness of Jesus Christ, called to empower mission and witness among the church membership. It's a huge task and a high profile for someone who was relatively unknown to the majority of church members only two years ago. This is the story of my call to be an apostle and the journey Community of Christ has undertaken on its path toward gender inclusiveness.

FOLLOWING THE RESIGNATION of Prophet/President W. Grant McMurray in November 2004, Community of Christ entered into a time of discernment concerning who was to fill that role.<sup>2</sup> Members and leaders alike prayed, fasted, and sought the will of God in a three-month process that culminated in a Spirit-filled meeting of the Council of Twelve Apostles at the Temple of Peace in Independence, Missouri. Having prayerfully considered the input of the members and leading quorums of the church, the Quorum of Twelve Apostles recommended Steve M. Veazey as the Prophet Designate. He was to be sustained by delegates at a special World Conference in June, 2005 and duly ordained in a public worship service in the Auditorium in Independence.

At the time, I was a high priest, a full-time minister and employee of the church, serving as the financial officer for the Sierra Pacific Mission Center in California. During the discernment process, I was diligent in prayer, fasting, scripture study, and meditation—but equally diligent in keeping the accounts and preparing for my first audit of the books. I had spent a little more than a year transforming myself into a mission center financial officer, and it was with some relief and a tinge of pleasure that I successfully weathered that audit.

I was busy doing accounts and property management one Tuesday afternoon in April 2005, when my computer informed me an email message had arrived from Steve Veazey. I assumed it was an announcement about the upcoming World Conference. It was two hours later when I opened it and read the following:

Confidential.

Top Secret.

Susan:

I would like to visit with you and your husband in your home in Sacramento. I can travel to your area for the meeting. Would you be available Thursday evening or Friday morning of this week. Please don't mention this to anyone else.

Yours in Christ, Steve Veazey.

Panic and dire scenarios raced through my mind. I had done something disastrous to the accounts, and Steve Veazey was coming out to. . . . No, that would have been Presiding Bishop Larry Norris, who is ultimately responsible for all the financial activities of the church. Perhaps I was being fired. . . . No, that would have been Field Apostle Ken McLaughlin, who is responsible for personnel in his field. I called my husband John, who read the email message with astonishment, and said, "He's going to ask you to serve on the World Church Leadership Council."

My mind refused to accept it, but over the next two days, I began to consider the possibility. Steve's most pressing organizational task was to complete his leadership team so it could be put in place immediately following his ordination. Reason said that his visit to our home had a direct relationship with the work that was top priority for him.

John and I picked up Steve at the airport and took him to our home, where I had done my best to prepare a pleasant, welcoming meal for him. We chatted over dinner, getting to know one another better by sharing stories of our courtship and interests. Over dessert, Steve identified the purpose of his visit.

"I suppose you know this is not just a social visit," he said.

"Yes," I answered somewhat ruefully. "I sort of figured that."

"Well, I won't keep you in suspense any longer. I'm here to ask you to serve as an apostle on the Council of Twelve."

I felt like I'd been punched in the stomach. All the wind went out of me, and I literally said, "Ooof!" Recovering, I said, "Steve, you need to know I have no confirmation of this call at all. I have no sense that God wants me to be an apostle, and furthermore, you don't know me!"

It was true. Other than this dinner in my home, we had spoken only once before, and that was when I had been hired by Community of Christ three years earlier to be a full-time minister for the church. At that time, Steve was President of the Council of Twelve. In the intervening years, I had experienced his leadership and ministry a few times when I attended appointee gatherings, but still, Steve and I were most definitely not well acquainted.

Most Community of Christ apostles in the recent past received their call after numerous years of full-time ministry and extensive public exposure in a variety of geographic fields. Most had grown up in the church, and many were offspring of parents well-known throughout the church. Nothing in my background seemed to fit this mold. Yet looking back, I see how events and experiences prepared me for the call to apostle.

I had been raised in an Air Force family, moving around the globe every two years—from France, to America, to Japan, to Spain, to England. My mother belonged to the RLDS Church. My father was a non-practicing Methodist. Both my parents were strong and independent, and they attempted to model traditional gender roles. Those efforts were subverted, however, by my father's frequent military absences, during which my mother assumed the dominant role and provided strength, creativity, and family unity.

My parents engendered in me both a belief that I could do anything and a desire to excel in everything I attempted. I set my sights on science—research biology, specifically—and went at it with a single-mindedness that wavered only after I met a friendly, outgoing art teacher named John Skoor. Abandoning science seemed a minor price to pay for the privilege of marrying him, and I've never had any regrets about giving up science.

John was ordained an elder in the church early in life, and I enjoyed assisting him as a young wife and mother of two charming daughters. He would discuss his sermons with me, explain his ministry, and ask my advice in handling pastoral concerns.<sup>3</sup> We often worked as a team in planning worship services, organizing events, and growing intellectually through classes and seminars. Gender issues were the farthest thing from my mind. I was happy to serve in any way possible and never thought of ordination for myself.

When we moved to Seattle in 1980, jobs were hard to come by. The Seattle Stake was looking for a youth director, and in sheer desperation, I applied. At that time, I had only my background as a Girl Scout and a brief summer of service in the Older Youth Service Corps to rely on. But the stake president "saw something in me," as he expressed it years later, and risked giving me the job. No one in the stake seemed surprised that an unknown, unordained young woman was responsible for the youth ministry. I tackled it like I did everything else and grew into the job.

When Prophet-President Wallace B. Smith presented the revelation in 1984 that opened the door for ordination of women, I was stunned. Women's ordination had never been a burning issue for me, and I had not been a voice calling for greater gender equality. Some in the church had challenged the exclusively male priesthood policy, trying to legislate for women's ordination and actively working to raise awareness among the membership concerning gender issues, but I was only vaguely aware of their voices and activity. I had not joined them.

**I**N GENERAL, THERE are three possible paths of change when an organization begins moving from patriarchal structure to gender inclusiveness. The first path is revolution: women demand leadership, and they wrest it from the men, leaving in their wake damaged relationships, broken families, and tarnished ideals that take decades to heal.

The second path is that of grace. Enlightened, self-actualized men, who are stable and spiritually mature, graciously invite women to step into leadership roles, and they do all they

can to insure a mutually empowering environment. That's ideal—and it seldom happens.

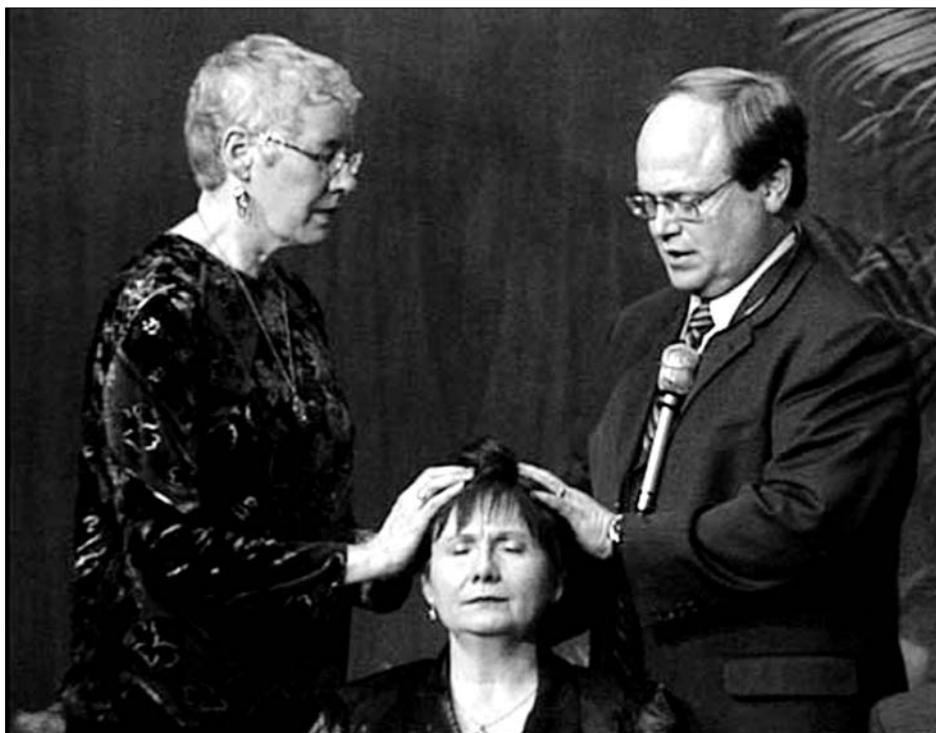
Our church walked a middle path between the two. Utilization of women's giftedness expanded in the 1970s in many congregations and the church's camp programs. Strong, outspoken women in Independence banded together to be a voice for inclusion, and through their efforts, a growing awareness of the potential for ordination of women began to permeate the church. In 1974, the First Presidency replaced the Women's Department with the Women's Ministry Commission. Marjorie Troeh became the Women's Ministry Commissioner and worked cooperatively with male leadership to bring new, creative input to World Church functions and activities.<sup>4</sup> Male leaders partnered with skilled women on many projects.

The 1970 World Conference initiated "fourteen years of resolutions dealing with the equality and the calling of all."<sup>5</sup> Resolutions proposing ordination of women were tabled, referred, ruled out of order, or defeated by the body. Other legislation insisted on prophetic direction prior to ordination of women.<sup>6</sup> The First Presidency appointed a Special Ministries Commission, which recommended greater utilization of the unordained and created a task force to study the ordination of women. Then, in 1984, Prophet-President Wallace B. Smith, in a revelation that caused him great struggle, brought an inspired message about the inclusion of women among the ordained ministry. The gender barrier was broken, and the first women were ordained a year later.<sup>7</sup>

I remember being curious, excited, and a little frightened when ordination was opened to women—frightened because at some point I might be asked to assume responsibility I wasn't sure I wanted. For many others, the change created havoc and dissent. Estimates of those who left the church range from fifteen to thirty thousand, from a membership of 220,000. That means about 3.5 to 7 percent of the people chose to withdraw their membership because of the issue of ordaining women.

The first women ordained often faced hostility from friends and family alike or found their ministry rejected by portions of their own congregation. I was privileged to be in a congregation that embraced women's ministry freely and completely. Being ordained was like coming home. Teacher, elder, evangelist<sup>8</sup>—I grew with each call, and again experienced helping hands along the way, both of men and of women.

Meanwhile, I moved from youth ministry into full-time work at the stake office. I served as executive assistant to four stake presidents, each of whom mentored me and pushed me



*Apostle Susan Skoor and President Steve M. Veazy ordain Becky Savage as second counselor in the Community of Christ First Presidency on 27 March 2007.*

to expand my understanding of church structure, policy, and procedure as well as ministry. In the role of assistant, I was both safe and empowered. I often did the work of the stake president, quietly, behind the scenes, pleased that I had expertise and knowledge that could be used. All I wanted to do was serve, and the opportunities were many and varied. As long as I distanced myself from the minority who still resisted women in priesthood roles, I felt supported, encouraged, and upheld by both men and women in the church.

**I** NTERESTINGLY, THAT CHANGED when I entered full-time appointment for the World Church in 2002. With the assignment of a position of authority came deeper struggles with gender issues. After receiving my appointment, I was at times overlooked in meetings; men were given credit for ideas I voiced; questions I raised were ignored or minimized until championed by a man. As I traveled in my field, I found it necessary to prove myself over and over again. Why? What had changed?

Here's one possibility: As long as I was in the background assisting the men, not claiming credit, and wielding only borrowed authority, I posed no threat. It was safe to open doors of opportunity for me, empower my ministry, and use my skills to best advantage. For the most part, that wasn't intentional, it just happened. My last stake president changed that. Although he consulted me as a colleague, he took the reins of leadership firmly into his own hands and worked independently of me. Intentionally, he no longer empowered me to just remain in the background. Instead, at Church Historian Mark Scherer's insti-

*Excerpt from the revelation opening priesthood ordination to women (Doctrine and Covenants, Section 156)*

156:7a. Hear, O my people, regarding my holy priesthood. The power of this priesthood was placed in your midst from the earliest days of the rise of this work for the blessing and salvation of humanity.

156:7b. There have been priesthood members over the years, however, who have misunderstood the purpose of their calling. Succumbing to pride, some have used it for personal aggrandizement.

156:7c. Others, through disinterest or lack of diligence, have failed to magnify their calling or have become inactive.

156:7d. When this has happened, the church has experienced a loss of spiritual power, and the entire priesthood structure has been diminished.

156:8a. It is my will that my priesthood be made up of those who have an abiding faith and desire to serve me with all their hearts, in humility and with great devotion.

156:8b. Therefore, where there are those who are not now functioning in their priesthood, let inquiry be made by the proper administrative officers, according to the provisions of the law, to determine the continued nature of their commitment.

156:9a. I have heard the prayers of many, including my servant the prophet, as they have sought to know my will in regard to the question of who shall be called to share the burdens and responsibilities of priesthood in my church.

156:9b. I say to you now, as I have said in the past, that all are called according to the gifts which have been given them. This applies to priesthood as well as to any other aspects of the work.

156:9c. Therefore, do not wonder that some women of the church are being called to priesthood responsibilities. This is in harmony with my will and where these calls are made known to my servants, they may be processed according to administrative procedures and provisions of the law.

156:9d. Nevertheless in the ordaining of women to priesthood, let this be done with all deliberateness. Before the actual laying on of hands takes place, let specific guidelines and instructions be provided by the spiritual authorities, that all may be done in order.

156:10. Remember, in many places there is still much uncertainty and misunderstanding regarding the principles of calling and giftedness. There are persons whose burden in this regard will require that considerable labor and ministerial support be provided. This should be extended with prayer and tenderness of feeling, that all may be blessed with the full power of my reconciling Spirit.

156:11a. Dear Saints, have courage for the task which is yours in bringing to pass the cause of Zion. Prepare yourselves through much study and earnest prayer.

156:11b. Then as you go forth to witness of my love and my concern for all persons, you will know the joy which comes from devoting yourselves completely to the work of the kingdom. To this end will my Spirit be with you. Amen.

WALLACE B. SMITH  
PRESIDENT OF THE CHURCH  
INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI  
APRIL 3, 1984

gation, he arranged for me to enter the master's of religion program at Graceland University and encouraged me to become an appointee in my own right. Once given a position of authority, I became visible in leadership and therefore posed a threat to any leaders and members still struggling with gender issues.

Here's another possibility: I grew into my ministry among people who had known me for many years, who respected and accepted my leadership long before women were ordained. I was a known quantity, loved and honored for who I was. As an appointee, however, I transferred to other locations. I traveled among those who had no history with me and no reason to respect or trust me. The "new kid on the block" is going to be challenged and tested. Being a woman doesn't give you an exemption from that—it only increases the heat in the normal trial by fire.

Here's another piece of the puzzle: Church members were accustomed to primarily one style of leadership, perhaps with a few slight variations. Women, however, bring new styles of leadership into religious and secular institutions alike. Society as a whole has begun exploring team-building, participative leadership models. Community of Christ intentionally fostered alternative leadership styles in mandatory seminary classes for appointees and in workshops. Just after I entered full-time employment for the church, all field officers were sent a copy of Dennis A. Romig's book, *Side by Side Leadership*. At a subsequent training event, we explored the seven principles and twenty skills of side by side leadership. Concepts such as power sharing, teamwork, transferred authority, and shared visionary goals fostered an openness to creative, participatory leadership styles.<sup>9</sup>

Change is occurring, but old ways die hard, and my softer style of leadership is not always understood or welcomed. Both men and women who are accustomed to, and want, top-down leadership are often uncomfortable with collaboration. It takes time, re-education, and patience to use alternative styles and still be seen as firm and strong. In Community of Christ, in recent years we have seen a broadening of leadership styles among men as well as women. Because women have been on board to model them, more men have found the courage to begin developing a softer approach utilizing grassroots cooperative leadership styles.

Honesty compels me to admit that paranoia also enters in. A few experiences of discrimination and rejection act like allergens. They sensitize a person and cause mistrust and defensiveness in what would otherwise be normal situations. Now if an idea of mine is not well-received in a meeting, I find myself wondering if it's because the idea is bad or if it's because I'm a woman. When I'm introduced to someone who acts cool and aloof, instead of assuming it's a personality trait I wonder if it's because I'm a woman in a position of authority. This suspicion is insidious, and I have to be on my guard against it.

**I**N 2003, MY daughter Christie researched and wrote her master's thesis about women in top leadership positions in Community of Christ. As of August of that year, nineteen individuals (15 percent) of the church's 127 full-time, paid ap-

pointees were women, including one woman in the Presiding Bishopric and three women serving on the Council of Twelve. Thirty-six percent of the field specialists were women, and 59 percent of those who worked at our church headquarters were women. Thirty-two percent of our 21,555 bi-vocational priesthood members were women. These figures, Christie wrote, indicate that “women still comprise a small number of the higher-paying, greater decision-making positions in the church, while at the same time, they make up a large number of the lower-paying, least decision-making positions.”<sup>10</sup>

Christie interviewed thirteen of the nineteen women serving in top leadership positions. She found that similar experiences emerged as commonalities among the participants. On the positive side, commonalities included:

- a deep sense of call and commitment.
- a long history of preparation prior to serving.
- great love for the message, vision, and goals of the church.
- a desire to help the church and its members become all that they can be.

These interviews also yielded similar stories about the struggles these women faced in being hired and accepted in their ministry. The interviews also revealed diversity within the North American church concerning individual and congregational support for women in ministry. Although most of our congregations have embraced and empowered women in ministry, a few congregations still refuse to ordain women.

Among all levels of leadership, speech habits, jokes, expectations, and assignments are affected by old gender models that are difficult to overcome. Becoming sensitive takes time, effort, and concentration—with multiple relapses being the norm. Many folks who truly wish to embrace gender equality still can’t seem to break out of the old molds of patriarchy. These difficulties, of course, are not unique to Community of Christ but rather represent common problems for organizations moving from patriarchy to gender inclusiveness.

The women Christie interviewed had many experiences in common, including:

- interviewers asking inappropriate questions or making discomfiting comments during hiring interviews.
- instances where male colleagues suppressed their voice or representation.
- times when their ideas were ignored.
- experiences where responsibilities were not given or were summarily taken away because of their gender.
- situations where they were bypassed in favor of people who were more patriarchal and hierarchically minded in nature.
- occasions when they felt their leadership styles were not valued.<sup>11</sup>

Christie’s thesis identified four areas where the church could improve in gender relations:

- 1) creation of an open forum in which women’s her-stories, past and present, can be shared and valued.
- 2) provision for a more female-friendly work environment.

3) establishment of a mentoring program for women.

4) emphasis on valuing women’s ways of leadership.<sup>12</sup>

In general, percentages of women in ministry in Community of Christ have not changed significantly in the last three years.<sup>13</sup> Yet, progress has occurred along the lines that Christie outlined. Awareness of gender issues has increased. Training has occurred on boundary issues, inappropriate gendered behavior, and harassment. Leadership mentoring has increased in frequency and quality. Awareness of variety in leadership styles is being acknowledged and explored.

We have seen a strengthening of the family unit because men and women in our faith tradition see each other as equally empowered spiritual beings whom God blesses in a variety of ways and calls into ministry. There are households where the wife, for instance, is an elder and the husband is a priest. Initially church leaders wondered if that would be a problem, create divorce or dissension, or undermine the husband’s ministry. That has not been the case. We have seen mutual support for priesthood offices regardless of where they fall in the so-called “hierarchy of offices.”

Children are growing up in a Community of Christ society, where gender equality empowers them to begin practicing public ministry and leadership when they are very young. Both girls and boys offer prayers, give short speeches or testimonies, receive offerings, and participate in other ways designed to deepen spirituality and build confidence in public ministry. Thus, the ordination of women has been very positive for men, for women, for the family, and for the whole church structure.

My hope is that soon we will simply focus on each individual as a person of worth, a person with great giftedness, a person with abilities to lead and to follow, to serve and to minister, called by God and acknowledged by human beings to give her or his giftedness in leadership ways. I would like the church to look at leadership styles rather than gender and to strive for inclusiveness of diverse styles in top quorums. I’d like our vocabulary, our way of thinking and speaking to drop references to gender because they are no longer important.

Recent revelation has called Community of Christ to become a peace church.<sup>14</sup> In order to fulfill this call, our congregations must continue to make concrete changes towards gender equality. By empowering the voices of women, providing a gender-inclusive environment, expanding our current mentoring program, and valuing all styles of leadership, Community of Christ can become a model for change in the empowerment of both men and women worldwide.

**I** BEGAN MY “her-story” with an account of the call I received from Steve Veazey to serve on the Council of Twelve. I close by sharing the call I received to that office from God. Two weeks after Steve’s visit, I participated in a brief worship service with the staff of the Sierra Pacific Mission Center. The focus for our worship was John 20:19–22.

You remember the story. On the evening of the resurrec-

tion, the eleven apostles gathered in fear and trembling behind locked doors. Christ came and stood in their midst. Think of all the things he might have said, the knowledge he could have imparted, the theological questions he might have answered. Yet the words that have passed down through the ages to us were merely these: "Peace be to you. As the Father sends me, so I send you." Suddenly I remembered that the meaning of the word "apostle" is "one who is sent."

A strong spirit of confirmation rested on me. It was as if the Risen Christ stood before me. Like the disciples of old, I was being called and sent beyond my own locked doors and hidden fears to share the apostolic witness of Christ. This calling is a challenge to undertake new experiences of mission, peace, and grace. God's grace never fails. In these recent months following the death of my husband, I have still felt the assurance and strength of God's Presence. I know, and can testify, that God is and will always be with each of us, healing our brokenness, using our weaknesses, continuing to call us into discipleship and sending us into the world to build the peaceable kingdom that includes all persons. ☞

## NOTES

1. This is a recent assignment change, as of 1 April 2007. Previously, I served in the Western Mission Field, which covered the western one-third of the contiguous United States, plus Alaska and Baja California. The new assignment represents the first time a woman has been assigned to an international field outside North America.

2. In general, the Prophet-President of the church has the right to name a successor, and several previous Presidents even made provision for succession by creating a sealed document naming a successor in the event of untimely death or disability. W. Grant McMurray voluntarily chose not to exercise this right. Throughout his tenure as Prophet-President, he reminded the church that we are called to be not just a people with a prophet, but also a prophetic people. He and his leadership quorums implemented discernment procedures to good effect in identifying a new name for the church and in establishing new understandings of tithing and generosity. It was, therefore, consistent with his previous actions that he entrusted the naming of a successor to the church as a whole, thus upholding us as a prophetic people.

3. Ordination in Community of Christ can be a life-long calling to one office, or, in other instances, a person may be called to serve in one office and then receive a subsequent calling or callings to other offices. John was an ordained priest first and was called to be an elder a few years later. An elder is a member of the Melchizedek priesthood and often functions as pastor of a congregation, performs all the sacraments except evangelist blessings, preaches, teaches, witnesses and invites others. Elders serving as pastors and elders serving in supportive roles in the congregation are all expected to provide "pastoral" care—that is, compassion, visiting ministry, and spiritual leadership to assist congregation members as they encounter the difficulties of life. Pastors in Community of Christ are generally bi-vocational, receiving no salary from the church. A few exceptions do exist.

4. It is worth noting that the titles of this commission and of the office held by Marjorie Troeh reflect the first time the terms "women" and "ministry" were officially linked in our tradition's history.

5. Becky L. Savage, *A Journey toward the Ordination of Women in the Community of Christ: A Historical Literature Review* (master's thesis, Graceland University, 2006), 87.

Perhaps a note about the way policies are enacted in our church is in order. Community of Christ is a theocratic democracy, that is, a church guided and administered by the Holy Spirit working through people to bring about divine purposes. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the people of the church share responsibility for governing the church. Checks and balances are in place to insure that human impulses contrary to the Spirit of God do not rule the church.

In practical terms, this means that ministers and administrators lead with the

consent of the people. Priesthood calls, legislative measures, budgets, and financial decisions require support from a conference made up of members of the church. Leaders are either elected outright or appointed with a subsequent sustaining vote of the people.

Congregations hold conferences to vote on their budgets, their officers, and their program of ministries. Large collections of congregations in geographic areas are called mission centers, presided over by a mission center president and mission center financial officer. Ultimately, however, these two officers and the joint decisions of the congregations are accountable to a mission center conference made up of either all the members in that area or elected delegates. Mission center conferences can enact legislation pertinent to their area but can also initiate and recommend legislation to come before the World Conference, which, if enacted, impacts the entire global church. World Conferences are held every three years, a recent change from every two years.

6. *Ibid.*, 76–85.

7. The revelation providing for ordination of women specified that there was to be a year of preparation prior to the first ordinations, to avoid hasty or unseemly decisions; the same revelation called for re-examination of priesthood accountability for all priesthood members. During that year, procedures for evaluating and establishing personal accountability for both men and women were instigated. The new priesthood guidelines specified that a candidate, man or woman, must complete a minimum of three basic classes of study and skill development prior to ordination: Introduction to Ministry, Introduction to Scripture, and a course relevant to the specific office of calling (such as elder, deacon, priest, or teacher). During the year of waiting, many women received calls, took classes, and spent time in personal preparation. When the year was complete, the first ordinations of women occurred.

8. Teacher is an office of the Aaronic priesthood. Like Aaron, brother of Moses, a teacher is a peacemaker and reconciler, one who watches over the people and provides listening, counseling, and encouragement to the members. A teacher may not perform any sacraments. Exercising the skills of teacher provided me good training for pastoral ministry as an elder, and being able to perform the sacraments as an elder expanded my ministry greatly. The call to evangelist required a deepening of my spiritual relationship with God and development of the ability to discern and be sensitive to God's leadings in the ministry of blessing. Evangelists put aside administrative tasks to act as spiritual guides and speak God's ongoing blessing in the lives of people, a heavy responsibility requiring great trust in the Spirit of God. Parallels exist between the peacemaking ministry of the teacher and the spiritual direction and blessing of the evangelist.

9. Dennis A. Romig, *Side by Side Leadership: Achieving Outstanding Results Together* (Marietta, Georgia: Bard Press, 2001), 66.

10. Christie Skoor, "Re-valuing Our Sisters: Women Leaders in the Community of Christ," (unpublished master's thesis, on file in the Temple Library of the Community of Christ, 2003), 82–83.

11. Skoor, "Re-valuing," 131.

12. *Ibid.*, 151.

13. I do not have the current statistics, but projections made in January 2007 indicated there would be 119 general officers, appointees, and field officers. Of those, seventeen would be women, which is 14 percent. Fifty-eight of the 178 field specialists would be women, which is 33 percent. At that time, a number of positions were not yet filled, and some of these would likely be filled by women, which would increase the percentages somewhat.

14. In 1984, Wallace B. Smith brought before the World Conference an inspired document (now in our Doctrine and Covenants as Section 156) which not only provided for the ordination of women but also initiated construction of the long-awaited Temple in Independence, Missouri. The revelation specified: "It shall be a temple of peace. . . ." That revelation sent Community of Christ on a new path toward becoming a peace church. Most faith traditions who call themselves a "peace church" began by bringing together individuals who agree on the definition of peace and the methods for living peace in the world and in their faith community. Our task is far more difficult. Our movement began over 150 years ago by bringing together individuals who agreed on a number of doctrinal issues other than peace. Over the years, our church has grown and gained members from many cultures, many walks of life, and many perspectives. Only now are we trying to transform ourselves into a peace church, incorporating an enormous diversity of opinions about what constitutes peace and how to achieve it.

Consequently, we must listen to one another, embrace the differences among us, and model the peace of Jesus Christ by affirming individuals who may differ from ourselves on the definition and implementation of peace. We have a long road ahead in becoming a unified peace church; but the challenge before us is clear, and the Spirit of God continues to move among us in transforming ways.