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In honor of the women of the ELCIC

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Foreword

The year 2001 is an important one for women in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. Twenty-five years ago this May, Pamela J. McGee was ordained to serve Morrisburg-Riverside Ontario Lutheran parish of the Lutheran Church in America-Canada Section. In June of that same year the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada voted to ordain women.

The first woman to be ordained in North America was Antoinette Brown whose ordination took place in Ohio in 1856. It was possible for women in Canada to be ordained in the United Church of Canada since 1936, although not many women found calls to parishes in those early years. Women sought ordination in the Lutheran churches in Canada at a slow but steady rate following the first ordination in 1976. By the year 2000 women made up 12% of the clergy roster of the ELCIC. At that time the student bodies at the two seminaries (Waterloo Lutheran Seminary and the Lutheran Theological Seminary Saskatoon) were approximately 40% women.

Women have often been described as the backbone of the Lutheran churches today. They not only make up the majority of members in the pew on Sunday mornings, most Sunday School teachers are women and through the work of the women's organizations an incredible amount of money is raised for local parishes as well as the national church. The decision of the churches in convention to ordain women was recognition of the extraordinary work of women in the church and acknowledgment that they should be given access to leadership roles as well.

In honour of the 25th anniversary of the ordination of the first woman in Canada the National Church Council of the ELCIC authorized a study of women in the ordained ministry, entitled *With Many Voices: Twenty-five Years of Ordained Ministry by Women in the Evangelical Lutheran in Canada 1976-2001*. The study was undertaken by researcher Dr. Dianne K. Kieren of Edmonton under the guidance of a steering committee established by the National Church Council. That study used survey and personal interviews to share the experiences of some 84 women (out of a potential 120) who were or

had been ordained in the ELCIC and its predecessor bodies. That study will be available to parishes shortly and has much to say about the experience of ordained women. It is hoped that the national church, synod staffs, seminary faculties, as well as local parishes will hear and talk about the findings.

In this issue of *Consensus* we honour the women of the ELCIC and their many gifts to the church. In the four offerings that follow we will hear the voices of women in the church. One is a parish pastor and three teach on Lutheran seminary faculties; three are ordained, one is a lay woman.

Gertrude D. Buck is Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saskatoon. She offers us the biblical story of the woman with the flow of blood. She approaches it both as a Bible study and as a story with implications for contemporary pastoral ministry. Buck invites us to use this story as a way to open discussion on topics that have often been considered taboo. Otherwise ancient "purity laws" can continue to bind people to the present day.

The Reverend Faith Brace is pastor at Inner City Pastoral Ministry in Edmonton. Using a grant for parish pastoral sabbaticals from the Louisville Institute she took a pilgrimage to visit the "sacred sites of the Celtic saints." She came to understand the power of stones that outlast human experience yet continue to tell the story of the faith of those who have gone before. From the stones of Ireland, often in barren landscape and often telling the story of pain and suffering, she finds strength to return to the barren streets of inner city Edmonton to speak again the Word of the Gospel to many experiencing today's pain and suffering.

The Reverend Dr. Sarah Dille is Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary. Her article comes from a lecture she delivered as a candidate for her present position. She works with three inter-related themes: corporate identity, justice, and affirmation of the world. In today's culture in which individualism is dominant she mourns the loss of our sense as being part of community and the understanding of justice that entails. She reminds us that "we are part of a living community of faith, we are members of a global community, we are called to establish justice in the world."

The Reverend Jann E. Boyd was pastor of St. Peter's Lutheran Church in New York City and Christ Lutheran Church in Philadelphia before coming to Saskatoon to become Assistant Professor of Liturgy

and Homiletics at the Lutheran Theological Seminary. The sermon included in these offerings by women of the ELCIC was preached at the closing liturgy at the August 2000 Liturgy Conference in Camrose, Alberta. She bids us hear anew the passage in John 15 "I am the vine, you are the branches." Too many people throughout our Christian history have used this text to exclude others who are different. "But the goal [of the vinedresser]," she points out, "as every gardener knows, is not how much you can kill. The goal is abundant, fruitful fragrant life." She urges her hearers to go forth to bring life to the world.

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