

Testing 1966: Unrest in Montreal¹

Jo-Ann Dickson

Thirteen years had passed since the decision to ordain women to the teaching and ruling eldership in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. The scene was Montreal, the year: 1979. A testing ground for the 1966 decision was about to emerge. Despite the fact that the ordination of women had become church law in 1966, discriminatory practices toward women in the realm of Ordained Missionary appointments for graduate students became a hotbed of contention in the Presbytery of Montreal in the late 1970s. This issue emerged not only within the distinct cultural and social setting that was the Quebec of the 1970s, but also within a secular world distinguished as a period of enlightenment for women. During this time women made their presence felt in both the legal profession and politics, and used their "legal skills to challenge laws they found discriminatory to them as a group."²

Along with this, the Quebec setting was vibrant with the spirit of Rene Levesque. Soldiers patrolled the streets of Montreal in response to the FLQ crisis and the resulting War Measures Act. Gregory Baum was responding to Vatican II at the Newman Center. Montreal, the largest city in Canada, was a powerful force in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. McGill University, which housed The Presbyterian College, a part of the Montreal Institute for Ministry, was totally integrated within the city. The Presbyterian College proved to be actively involved in the concerns of women in the 1970s by updating the curriculum to reflect women in ministry. One new course, "Women's Issues" was taught by a guest lecturer, Dr. Letty Cox³, a therapist in sexuality. Another course, "The Church in the World," expanded its frame of reference when women's issues came to the fore to include group dynamics and civil disobedience.⁴ This helped the students to determine what to do about their plight. In addition, a female student at The Presbyterian College, Jean Armstrong, had been Chaplain at the Newman Center for a period of six years, and had even received communion there. Montreal society lived on the cutting edge of change.

It is possible that a conference entitled "The Marginal and the Prophetic" served as a catalyst to spark women's interest in their role in the world.⁵ The timing of this conference was crucial as it immediately preceded interviews conducted by the Superintendents of Mission of The Presbyterian Church in Canada with the graduating students of The Presbyterian College. All of this produced a testing ground for these students as concern had arisen over the restrictions

¹ This paper is one-third of a Master of Theological Studies thesis which was submitted in 2008 at Knox College. It focuses on the aftermath of the 1966 decision by the General Assembly to ordain women to the teaching and ruling eldership. Here I am dealing only with the teaching eldership.

² Jan Coomber and Rosemary Evans, *Women: Changing Canada* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford UP, 1997) 64.

³ Jean Armstrong, personal interview, Fall 2007.

⁴ Jean Armstrong.

⁵ Jean Armstrong.

placed on Ordained Missionary appointments. Historically, the Ordained Missionary System had been created to address a very specific problem—the issue of “winter supply for student mission fields.”⁶ By 1979, it had become the standard way of placing graduates. According to a later report in *The Acts and Proceedings of the One Hundred and Twelfth General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada* (1986), the Ordained Missionary System created “a schizophrenic approach to our ‘doctrine of ministry’!”⁷ Arising out of it then was the need to “rationalize both the Presbyterian doctrine of ministry and its understanding of call.”⁸ In the Ordained Missionary System, The Board of World Mission was the final arbiter of the graduate’s call. As such, this Board walked a fine line with presbyteries. The Board had the authority to determine whether a candidate had a genuine call and was suitable for the appointment. The Board of World Mission also represented the calling congregation, without the candidate preaching for a call. Not only was this a conflict of interest, but a hiatus existed between call and appointment. As early as 1977, The Board of World Mission was experiencing difficulty in the process of placing candidates and therefore, ultimately, it saw the need to remove itself from the task of making such appointments in the future.

As part of the Ordained Missionary appointment system, students made three choices of call from a master list of possibilities. There was a single list for both men and women, but the options open to women were strictly controlled. Apparently, some of the superintendents did not really want women in their particular regions. They seemed more interested in testing the ordination of women to the teaching eldership in other regions first. For the most part, it was not the congregation that placed limitations on women. Nevertheless, the graduating students appeared to have a case for prejudice and discrimination against women, and this was fed in part by the unique nature of the student body at The Presbyterian College in the late 1970s. It was comprised mainly of married students, and all but two female students were married to ministers. Difficulties arose when female graduates were sent to areas where their spouses might not find any, or their particular type of, employment. And so, the mood of the times was ripe for action. Not only that, one professor had “confessed that if women have been accepted as ordained ministers without prejudice since 1966, then we cannot tolerate any form of prejudice.”⁹ The graduating students were prepared to go forward with the support of three of The Presbyterian College professors. A kairos moment had arrived!

By 2 March 2 1979, a telegram, along with a petition of thirty-eight names, was forwarded to one of the Superintendents of Mission of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. The telegram read:

We bring to your attention the prejudice experienced by women in the appointment process. The choices available to women have been severely restricted based upon congregational preferences for men and the unquestioning implementation by the Superintendents of Synods and the Personnel Committee

⁶ *The Acts and Proceedings of the One Hundred and Twelfth General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada* (1986): 462.

⁷ *Acts and Proceedings* (1986): 463.

⁸ *Acts and Proceedings* (1986): 463.

⁹ Personal papers of Jean Armstrong.

with respect to preferences. This is contrary to the 1966 article of the Assembly in agreeing to the ordination of candidates without regard to sex.¹⁰

Of the thirty-eight signatures on the petition, thirteen were women and twenty-five were men, three of whom were professors at The Presbyterian College. The thirty-five Presbyterian College students and graduates were a cohesive group who rallied around events, and hence came to be referred to as the "Montreal mafia." This cohesiveness was significant for the events which would follow, and the Presbytery of Montreal, which met within The Presbyterian College, fully supported the students.

In another corner of the country, in southern Ontario, were Knox College and its graduating students. These students were not caught up in the upheaval of Quebec society, yet they had a significant role to play as graduating students in 1979. Although their circumstances were quite different, several of them were also contemplating ministry as couples. However, there was an element of insecurity among the students here, brought on not only by their youth (ministry would be their first career), but because they were recovering from the death of a beloved principal the year before, and also adjusting to new professors on the faculty. On the plus side, it was evident to the Chairman of The Board of World Mission at the time that when these students entered Knox College, they were quite a unique group. The Chairman, who fully supported both women and couples in the ministry of Word and Sacrament, had the foresight to realize that placing these graduates in the customary manner would be challenging. It was not enough to meet the requirements of congregations and indeed, to fill pulpits. Instead, it was necessary to pastorally satisfy the call of students. Therefore, as early as 1977, the Chairman dialogued regularly and informally with the Knox students. In so doing, he was able to determine what types of call they wished to pursue. For example, one couple wanted half-time ministry in one charge, but this would require a change in church polity which did not allow for half-time ministry. Another couple wanted single charges within close proximity, while another student, who was a medical doctor, requested specialized palliative ministry. As a result of the dialogue, students at Knox College trusted the policy-makers and felt very much a part of making new policy, while students at The Presbyterian College felt that the policy-makers could not be trusted. Finally, at the presbytery level, there was uneasiness among the Knox College students, particularly the female students, who were grilled during interviews for licensing about their marriages and the possibility of having families after being educated (fully paid tuition) at the College. This left the students fearful and very emotional.¹¹ A letter to The Presbyterian College graduating student, Jean Armstrong, described the prevailing mood at Knox College. The six female graduating students at Knox College were in agreement with the findings of The Presbyterian College graduating students, but were either too overcome with emotion or just too scared to act. In fact, a male student had telephoned one of the superintendents, concerned about whether his appointment would be sustained.¹² Yet, all the Knox male and female graduating students had also been subjected to discrimination in the Ordained Missionary appointment process. The Montreal situation was not an isolated incident; both of these theological colleges had been affected. The Knox letter further stated that the courage of The Presbyterian College

¹⁰ Personal papers of Jean Armstrong.

¹¹ Brooke and Linda Ashfield, Knox College Class of 1979, personal interview, Winter 2008.

¹² Personal papers of Jean Armstrong.

graduating students might influence the appointment proceedings, and the letter writer concluded by saying that, in her view, "the whole appointment process needs to be revamped."¹³

On 6 March 1979, a follow-up letter was sent to The Board of World Mission after the appointments had been made, to reaffirm the following two suggestions:

"We request another meeting with the Superintendents and Personnel Committee."

"We request a review of possible appointments with reference to sex."¹⁴

Following the telegram, petition, and letter, the action shifted to the floor of the Presbytery of Montreal where Mrs. Alison Stewart-Patterson, a 1977 graduate student who had received a choice appointment as associate at St. Andrew and St. Paul in Montreal, and Miss Linda Corry, the first women graduate of The Presbyterian College (1976), jointly submitted and reported on "A Statement of Affirmation for Women in Ministry."¹⁵ This report included some very serious questions on "PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION,"¹⁶ and was presented to the Presbytery of Montreal on 13 March 1979, on behalf of the female students. It was a well-organized, thought-provoking, powerful statement that began by pleading the women's case. The presenter, Alison Stewart-Patterson, began by transporting the listeners back to the setting of the tomb, early that Sunday morning of Jesus' resurrection. It was there that women had been given the message of their calling. Yet, over the centuries, that message had been virtually ignored. Stewart-Patterson continued passionately that "it is not just I who stands before you tonight. It is a long line of women, starting with the two Marys, coming through Linda [Corry] and I and continuing on into the future."¹⁷ All of the women mentioned had withstood prejudice and discrimination against them as ministers of Christ because they were women.

The Statement went on to reiterate the basic theological issue of The Presbyterian Church in Canada on the ordination of women which arose out of the report of The Committee on the Place of Women in the Church to the 1965 General Assembly. In part, the report stated: "The call of Jesus Christ to women is to bring all their distinctive gifts into a partnership with men in every relationship of human life, and the concomitant call of Christ to men is to accept such a giving and to respond to it wholeheartedly."¹⁸ And so it seemed "partnership" was fundamental to our belief, and the church appeared ready to accept it.¹⁹ At this point, language would be crucial in ensuring that both women's "call" as in Christ and "partnership" with their male colleagues would be clearly stated. However, the third recommendation of the report which stated "that The Presbyterian Church in Canada affirm the right of women, who believe themselves called by God, and in whom the church is able to discern the necessary gifts, to enter and share the ministry of Word and Sacrament in all its aspects,"²⁰ was later withdrawn with the

¹³ Personal papers of Jean Armstrong.

¹⁴ Personal papers of Jean Armstrong.

¹⁵ Personal papers of Jean Armstrong.

¹⁶ Capitalization in the original.

¹⁷ Personal papers of Jean Armstrong.

¹⁸ *The Acts and Proceedings of the Ninety-First General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada* (1965): 384.

¹⁹ *Acts and Proceedings* (1965): 384.

²⁰ *Acts and Proceedings* (1965): 385.

consent of Assembly, and sent down to the Presbyteries subject to the language of the Barrier Act which states overtures in a more official legal language. The transformation appeared as: "By enactment of the General Assembly, women are eligible to become ministers of the church, and any reference herein or hereafter in the Book of Forms to men as candidates for the ministry, as licentiates or as ministers shall refer *mutatis mutandis*, to women, where applicable."²¹ The right of ordination of women to the teaching and ruling eldership in The Presbyterian Church in Canada was enacted into law in the thirteenth sederunt of the 1966 General Assembly.²² The women who presented the Statement believed that the crucial part lost in translation to Barrier Act language was to be found in that area where women suffered most discrimination against their ministry. The language had lost the sense of call of Jesus Christ and the gifts to be shared by women in ministry as a partnership with men, both of which were found in the spirit of the 1965 report. To have the law was simply not enough. The law must be expressed carefully so as not to lose the intent of the original proposal. The words "call," "gifts," and "partnership" were all significant components of women's ordination.

As the two presenters, Alison Stewart-Patterson and Linda Corry, pointed out later in their report, the swelling of the ranks of women as teaching elders progressed very slowly. From 1966 until the first women graduated from The Presbyterian College in 1976, the "fullness of the vision may have dimmed."²³ Only eleven women had graduated from the Presbyterian theological colleges in Canada in those years (1966-1975).²⁴ Thirteen years after the law to ordain women had been enacted the language of that law itself was of no help and was in fact inadequate. Stewart-Patterson noted that when she entered college she had asked her minister what had happened to the women who had graduated, because she had never seen a woman who was a minister. He replied that many had gone into other forms of ministry rather than that of Word and Sacrament. Her reaction was "Why that seems funny!"²⁵ However, she came to realize that "funny" was not the operative word, given the situation that she discovered in her final year at The Presbyterian College. What lurked all around women candidates for ministry was prejudice and discrimination. What a letdown for female graduating students after years of study! The document entitled "A Statement of Affirmation for Women in Ministry" was presented to the Presbytery of Montreal. It listed a number of comments framed by the words "discrimination is." These comments were directed by male ministers, Church Office personnel, committee members, several of whom were females, and male congregants to ordained women seeking a call. All have been included below because they are both revealing and varied:

"That's a difficult congregation. It would be better to put a man in there."

"It's going to be difficult to place you. Maybe you could take another degree."

²¹ *The Acts and Proceedings of the Ninety-Second General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada* (1966): 7.

²² *Acts and Proceedings* (1966): 78.

²³ Personal papers of Jean Armstrong.

²⁴ See the reports of the senates of the theological colleges in *The Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada* (1968-1977).

²⁵ Personal papers of Jean Armstrong.

"You are a problem to place because you are female, married, have children and were divorced."

"Your husband is supposed to support you. Why do you want to work?"

"X was the first girl minister this charge has had. She had to prove herself and she did a good job. But I sincerely hope for her own sake she does not seek the ordained ministry. She'd make a good teacher or social worker."

"It may be necessary for you to wait two or three years for an appointment."

"We can appoint you to Africa, but you will probably have to put your children in boarding school."

"What is going to happen to your children" Don't you think you should stay home and take care of them?"

"Do you realize you are decreasing your husband's effectiveness?"

"Churches want a minister's wife to support him, not go to another church herself."

"How would it be if we appointed you to the same church as your husband. You could keep house, and take care of the church when your husband is on a continuing education programme. Maybe you could even be an interim-moderator sometime."

"Why do you want to be ordained anyway? Wouldn't you be happier at home with your family?"

"If you really want to be ordained, have your husband resign his church and take his job, and be ordained that way."

"Any man is better than a woman."²⁶

The above comments were not innocent suggestions. They expressed "a complete denial of women's 'call' by Christ to his ministry. The jokes and slurs could not be tolerated for they were part of an utter disregard shown by men—themselves called by Christ and living out that call—for Christ's call to another, particular child of God, who happens to be a woman."²⁷ To confirm this, the paper went on to quote Peter's words in Acts 10:34-35: "Then Peter began to speak to them, 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but that in every nation, anyone who fears him and does what is right, is acceptable to him'" (NSRV).

²⁶ Personal papers of Jean Armstrong.

²⁷ Personal papers of Jean Armstrong.

The attitude of prejudice challenged women to test that they had a call, that the call was necessary, and that it was from God rather than a product of their emotional imaginations. Women were asked to make the same vows and commitments at ordination as men. Yet, the authenticity of their call was not fully acknowledged. A comment by the Rev. Linda Bell, first woman Moderator of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, verifies the importance of call in the following words: "the challenges of the times [caused me] to re-examine my convictions and sense of call, and to recommit to the Lord's service, for you cannot take your call for granted when you are being challenged."²⁸

Alison Stewart-Patterson and Linda Corry posed a question to the presbyters that night: "Do you really accept that Christ can and does call women to be his ministers?" hoping and praying that the presbyters could give an honest "yes" as an answer. This would release women to get on with Christ's work, free from the chains of innuendos, slights, and prejudice. Believing in the strength of God's call to each of them, and completely convinced that the forces of prejudice were evil and very strong, was what had brought them before the Presbytery of Montreal that night of 13 March 1979. The Presbytery was supportive, and responded with a Memorial to the 105th General Assembly in 1979. These two women drew attention to the fact that "a particular type of discrimination was being experienced by each minister, licentiate or graduating student who is a woman."²⁹ Disregarding General Assembly policy, it had become the practice to permit congregations applying to presbytery for permission to proceed to a call, or for a Board of World Mission appointment, to say publicly that they would not interview, hear, or accept a candidate who was a woman. Testing was indeed part of the struggle. Thus it was incumbent upon the seven Presbyterian College ordinands who were women, and who had been faced with a restricted list of choices to receive them, to speak out in this statement, and share their experiences of congregations and superintendents who allowed congregations to follow that course.

The presentation ended with three recommendations to the Presbytery of Montreal, and an appeal by the women for the court to accept its responsibilities by affirming General Assembly policy on the ordination of women and to support the struggle of the women who were presently under the care of the said court. "The struggle is both for the equality of opportunity, and the freedom to minister as God calls them, not at the whim of his people. The struggle is against any and all prejudice and discrimination, whether intentional or innocent, against women as ministers of Christ."³⁰ The recommendations to the Presbytery of Montreal were:

RECOMMENDATION 1: That this court approve and support the substance of the telegram sent to the Board of World Mission by students, faculty and ministers concerning the restriction of appointments for candidates who are women, and that the students be allowed to quote this support when they visit the Board of World Mission. [The text of the telegram appeared here and can be found on p. 2-3 of this paper].

²⁸ Taped address to the 132nd General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, Women in Ministry Committee (2006).

²⁹ Personal papers of Jean Armstrong.

³⁰ Personal papers of Jean Armstrong.

RECOMMENDATION 2: That this court affirm the policy of the General Assembly and the law of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, enacted in 1966, concerning the ordination of women in the following ways:

a.) Presbytery will not pass on the application of a congregation for an appointment by the B.W.M., if it [the congregation] is not willing to accept whoever the Board appoints, regardless of sex.

b.) Presbytery will not give permission to moderate in a call to a congregation which is not willing to interview/hear women and men candidates. Presbytery will instruct interim-moderators that congregations are not permitted to make public statements about their preferences for a minister, based on sex.

RECOMMENDATION 3: That the question of the re-education of this court, its congregations, ministers and laity, concerning "women in ministry" be referred to the Presbytery Life Committee; and that they be instructed to bring forward a programme/workshop to be conducted at a presbytery meeting later this year.³¹

These recommendations were received and approved by the Presbytery of Montreal on 13 March 1979. Three days later, on 16 March, the student contingent from The Presbyterian College arrived at National Office for its annual visit. Even a bomb scare on arrival at Union Station would not appear as a bad omen and dampen the students' spirits for the mission ahead: to contest the inequalities in a decision that had been history since 1966. As one superintendent wrote in a later letter, "What a tale of horror would be told that day, the ides of March plus one at the Don Mills inner sanctum of the Women's Missionary Society."³² And he went on:

Not for frail females was the fray that day.
Amazons, bold, in battle array disdained their prey.
Forever, and forevermore, would womanhood
Be preferred for work throughout the kirk.
But what a farce was to unfold!³³

Alas, the shoe was on the other foot! That day, women were perceived to be the predators. The superintendents were trapped between them and a position of making appointments that they perceived no longer worked. However, women would be challenged at the meeting since everything was carved in stone and would go according to the plans of the superintendents.

It was in that large Women's Missionary Society board room that the action was played out. In attendance were superintendents from across the country, executive staff, and members of The Board of World Mission Personnel Committee, female student spokesperson from The Presbyterian College, Jean Armstrong, along with the male spokesperson who was president of the graduating year at The Presbyterian College. The room was configured so that this group encircled the eleven Presbyterian College students. Employing the strategies learned in their "Church in the World" course of study, the students in the center maintained their silence throughout, while the authority to speak was given to the two spokespersons. The silence was

³¹ Personal papers of Jean Armstrong.

³² Personal papers of Jean Armstrong.

³³ Personal papers of Jean Armstrong.

unnerving and powerful, but as a strategy to get things done, it worked. This "sullen" silence angered the superintendents as did the "curt, defiant, refusal [of an apology] from the spokeswoman."³⁴ Although supportive of this approach, Knox College graduating students were not in attendance that day. Their work had been ongoing with the policy-makers over the two previous years.

The petition and actions of The Presbyterian College students on 16 March 1979 created fallout, and raised the ire of at least one superintendent. In two different letters dated 26 and 28 March, he went on to express his feelings in the following points:

- that the claims of the graduate students could not be substantiated
- that the purpose of the students' action was to manipulate the church toward a preferred status for women ministers
- [that] it is lamentable that the Presbytery of Montreal should ever approve and support such behavior
- that any trusted and respected teachers would seriously associate themselves with such as that and even attach their names
- [that] now we must become crusaders for the equal rights of women in ministry
- [that] it is alarming that so many P.C. female graduates approach the superintendents and the Board of World Mission with so much self-interest and the insistence that the Church should adjust to meet their desires
- [that] perhaps we need a system of recall for women models in ministry so that they can be recycled to acquire a sense of mission.³⁵

The above comments demonstrated that the feelings of the superintendents arose out of anger. Most of their comments should never have been written. It is lamentable that some at least did not respect the rights of women to be ordained. Women had been demeaned in the process and were supposed to keep a stiff upper lip. They had been subjected to a lot of horse-trading at the hands of the superintendents who in fact, rarely spoke to them and would never invite them to sit at table with them in the hotel where they were staying. Through a process of intimidation, much pressure was placed on the women to change their story and withdraw from the situation. One female was told that there would be no future for her in The Presbyterian Church in Canada if she continued to support the "trouble-maker" Jean Armstrong.³⁶

To the male president of the Class of 1979 went these words from one of the superintendents in a letter dated 28 March 1979: "Greater folly hath no woman, or man, than this—to slander and slur and smear, to deride, discredit and defame the Superintendents."³⁷ There was no question that the superintendents were angry and felt betrayed by the actions of The Presbyterian College graduating students on 16 March 1979. In fact, the same superintendent inferred that "the cranial equipment of some PC graduates is sometimes infinitesimal and frequently much below average [. . .]. You have probably striven to forget [. . .] that

³⁴ Personal papers of Jean Armstrong.

³⁵ Personal papers of Jean Armstrong.

³⁶ Shirley Gale, personal interview, June 2008.

³⁷ Shirley Gale.

sickening scene—the cowering Board of World Mission elite, about to be decimated, dismembered, disemboweled and decapitated by their adversaries, the PC women libbers.”³⁸

In our world of litigation, it is hard for us to identify with the stance that people in leadership roles took here. The superintendents should have been role models despite the challenges. They needed to act responsibly. The language was not only harsh, but downright abusive. The fact still remained that women had by church law been ordained since 1966, and so it was up to the superintendents to make the law work. They travelled around; they knew the mood in presbyteries. They needed to respond to changing times and needs. They needed to counter ignorance with education; they needed to use more equitable methods of assigning appointments. It was up to them to keep education in the forefront and to respect 1966 as a defining moment. There was no need for divisiveness where a law had been put in place. The superintendents needed to be of one mind in their interpretation of that law.

The women were perceived to have lost, since, according to the superintendents, they, themselves, had been fair and just and not discriminatory against women, and women had received some plum positions in keeping with their spouses’ geographic location and workplace. To Jean Armstrong, the spokeswoman for The Presbyterian College graduating students, went these words from another superintendent: “It was with surprise and considerable regret that I learned that you were in the forefront of the ‘telegram episode’ and had indeed phoned to Toronto to try to get women in Knox III to sign the petition to accompany it.”³⁹

Jean Armstrong was appointed to an Edmonton charge. She had received the appointment that she desired, as had most of the others. Jean was not being self-serving in this process, but simply wished to support others who had not received the appointment that they had requested. She felt strongly that women be considered for any charge without reference to sex. This, in fact, is supported by Valerie Korinek’s comment: “Women’s ordination in the United Church of Canada illustrates how difficult it is to change the gender ideology that suffuses the workplace.”⁴⁰ In the end, Jean Armstrong was accused of being protectionist and sexist since her appointment was within the bounds of her husband’s employment. The superintendent reminded Jean that

in accepting the appointment made by the Board of World Mission annual meeting to the [name] congregation, I want to remind you again that these people have gone through troubled times and you will have strong personalities with which to deal. When I mentioned this to you in Montreal you told me you could defuse situations. Unfortunately, you did the very opposite last month. The [name] congregation cannot afford agitation and confrontation. It needs a loving, caring, understanding, wise, pastoral outreach ministry.⁴¹

In fact, Jean did carry out her appointment and then her call to this congregation in a highly professional manner for a period of seven years in which the charge flourished. The

³⁸ Shirley Gale.

³⁹ Shirley Gale.

⁴⁰ Valerie Korinek, “No Women Need Apply: The Ordination of Women in the United Church, 1918-65,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 74.4 (1993): 509.

⁴¹ Personal papers of Jean Armstrong.

admonishment which she received was for a particular place and time in which she was willing to take a stand on an issue that should really have been a non-issue. Jean embraced the issue without fear, and with the best interests of all her colleagues in mind.

Another candidate had an additional hurdle to cross. Shirley Gale was appointed to St. Matthew's congregation in Montreal where a male student minister had served and had subsequently been appointed. That individual reneged on his appointment saying that Shirley needed that particular charge to be close to her husband who ministered in the Presbytery of Montreal. However, the original appointee simply wished to return to his home province of Nova Scotia. This left Shirley Gale at the mercy of an interviewing committee composed entirely of males from St. Matthew's. Despite the comment "you can come and prove yourself" from one member of the committee and the fact that the church had burned down previous to the appointment, Shirley went on to have a very fruitful ministry in that congregation. Not only that, she was asked to serve on the Board of World Mission where there had been encouragement throughout for women to hang in. Undoubtedly, her experience would be highly valued in that position.

All of these events created a need for the Presbytery of Montreal to act on behalf of ordained women throughout The Presbyterian Church in Canada. By 27 March 1979, the Presbytery had drafted a Memorial to the 105th General Assembly as a response to a motion placed on the floor of the Presbytery on 13 March 1979, to appoint a Special Committee to undertake the following:

1. Education of the church in the implications of its law and commitment with regard to the ordination of women;
- 2.a. Change in the attitudes which cause congregations to be unwilling to consider a woman as their minister; interim-moderators to be unduly influenced by this prejudgement; presbyteries to permit this prejudice; and boards and committees of Assembly to be insensitive to the issue of discrimination against women in ministry;
- 2.b. Change in the attitudes which cause congregations to be unwilling to consider women as ruling elders; presbyteries which permit this prejudice amongst their members;
3. Modification of the church's language and terminology, both oral and written, on all church bodies, so as not to be exclusive of women, with particular attention to the Book of Forms, the Book of Common Order and the Book of Praise; or to take whatever action the General Assembly in its wisdom deems best.⁴²

The preamble to these recommendations praised The Committee on the Place of Women in the Church which gave the "how" and "why" men and women should accept each other as equals. However, the framers of the Memorial believed that "the harmonious partnership in the image of God" was lost in the change from vision to law.⁴³ Along with the law, the church must provide

⁴² *The Acts and Proceedings of the One Hundred and Fifth General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada* (1979): 467.

⁴³ Personal papers of Jean Armstrong.

means to educate clergy and laity in the concept that "men and women alike are the objects and servants of the purpose of God, which the church has been created to express and fulfill."⁴⁴

In every other part of society, women were claiming the parity that the church had offered for thirteen years, yet women in ministry continued to experience prejudice and discrimination. The plea was then that "all women members of the church should accept the responsibility and be given the opportunity of serving Jesus Christ and their fellow human beings in all areas and occupations of life as the members of his Body."⁴⁵ The Memorial did indeed speak to these concerns. In addition to the Memorial, The Presbyterian College Report of the Senate 1978-79 included a recommendation #5 which requested that the Board of Ministry establish a Task Force which would seek to discover ways: "1. 'to eliminate discrimination against women in the appointment and the call procedure [. . .] and 2. to educate presbyteries, sessions and congregations regarding the partnership of men and women in ministry.'"⁴⁶ It appears that the women had made their point at all levels. On the one hand, The Presbyterian College graduating students had worked effectively through their Presbytery, while the Knox College graduating students had worked successfully with the policy-makers. In the end, both angles were covered.

Although the Memorial was not in proper form, a special committee was appointed to report to the 106th General Assembly. Its report was very comprehensive, including a bibliography and a fact-finding questionnaire based on the ideas stated within the body of this Memorial. There was a strong response rate to the questions (42%).⁴⁷ In the process, the committee drew the attention of the whole church to the issues raised by the women at The Presbyterian College in 1979, and the report as a whole was adopted.

It can be concluded that the graduate and graduating students of The Presbyterian College had successfully drawn to the attention of the wider church the prejudice and discrimination that characterized church polity since the ordination of women to the teaching and ruling eldership had become law in 1966. Clearly, this study reveals that there was resistance to women taking their rightful place in the ministry of Word and Sacrament. The door had barely opened in thirteen years. Virtually nothing was found in the secondary literature on the situation at The Presbyterian College and Knox College in the years leading up to the Presbytery of Montreal's Memorial to the 105th General Assembly. In his book *Enduring Witness*, Dr. John Moir, the historian of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, reported on the 1979 Memorial as follows: "negative attitudes towards women were certainly in the minority, but most sessions had not discussed the issues."⁴⁸ The "liberty of conscience" debate precipitated by Daniel MacDougall's request to the Presbytery of East Toronto would follow and trigger new challenges for women in their chosen call. It can be concluded, though, that the Memorial sent by the Presbytery of

⁴⁴ *The Acts and Proceedings of the Eighty Ninth General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada* (1963): 307.

⁴⁵ *The Acts and Proceedings of the Ninetieth General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada*, (1964): 466.

⁴⁶ *The Acts and Proceedings of the One Hundred and Third General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada* (1977): 273.

⁴⁷ *The Acts and Proceedings of the One Hundred and Sixth General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada* (1980): 394.

⁴⁸ John S. Moir, *Enduring Witness: A History of The Presbyterian Church in Canada* (Don Mills, ON: Presbyterian Publications, [1975]) 280.

Montreal to the 105th General Assembly regarding the discrimination and prejudice against women was at least one factor, if not the only one, in precipitating the "liberty of conscience" debate.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Besides the "liberty of conscience" debate in the 1980s, there were additional challenges to be faced by women in the 1990s. These included the election of the first woman moderator of The Presbyterian Church in Canada as well as the appointment of the first woman principal of Knox College.