

Message from the President

Finding our voice



Verla Michel Kwiram

Carefully taught, we conscientious women continue to subdue ourselves to serve quietly, submitting to the decisions of others, humbly accepting the jobs that others don't choose to do, because—well, just because we want everything to run smoothly and without too much fuss. And we daily pray that we will be more like Jesus.

Therefore, self-promotion is not our goal. We are slightly embarrassed to be

chosen as spokespersons because we are comfortable with men up front, taking the lead. We don't want to push for position, because we are not seeking the limelight, for its own sake. What would Jesus do?

In modest humility we promote others, building their self-esteem, letting them glow in the limelight, and quietly taking satisfaction from their development. If our children can succeed, that is enough. If our sons can finish professional school or get an MBA and our daughters can marry well, we can count our work a success. If our husbands gain some distinction, that will be satisfaction enough.

We toil in quiet obscurity without a lot of resistance to the status quo. Our needs and problems remain unarticulated. Others interpret our passivity as contentment. Besides, we don't have time to do push our agenda. Our plates are already full.

When we are nominated to positions of leadership and our nominations fail because we are women, we protest not for ourselves because our modesty prevents it, although we know that the pseudo-religious reasons given for keeping us out of positions are not valid.

We don't want to rock the boat. We don't want to make men nervous. We never want to appear self-seeking. After all, aren't we the reason that evil entered the world? Do we not bear the curse of Eve?

But what does the church lose when we stay in our place, in our forever-supporting role? Who else can articulate our needs and those of women around us? Who else can balance the excesses that inevitably arise when

no counterforce exists? Who else will care when another woman suffers pain in silence—pain that we know and sometimes feel?

Who else will speak out when a woman is shoved, slapped, and roughed up? How many men fight domestic abuse or pave a way for education when a young woman has given up her training to pay for a brother or a husband's tuition? Who helps when she is consigned to menial work because no one cared enough to help her qualify for a better position? Who advocates for the woman infected by her lover with sexually transmitted diseases? Who is concerned for the woman infected with HIV/AIDS because her husband took a mistress?

We women comprise 70-75% of the membership of our church community. Yet our needs have not found a central place in the agenda of the church. What is wrong with this picture?

More like Jesus we would be...more of His love who died for me.... Yes, if we want to be like Jesus, we cannot ignore the needs of the women around us. Jesus sensitively and courageously reached out to express the needs and heal the wounds of broken-hearted women around Him. He ignored societal expectations to touch the untouchables—poor women. He healed through sympathetic understanding women who had been violated and abused. He lifted others, and we admire Him and want to emulate His every act. But without finding our voice, we cannot lift others. Without empowerment, we cannot empower others. Without courage and wisdom, we cannot resist exploitation.

To be like Jesus we have no choice. We must take our seats at the table. We must articulate our needs. We must speak our truths. We must learn to practice a pro-active compassion. We must sometimes rock the boat, upset the status quo, or even offend those with entrenched interests. We must sacrifice to keep girls in school, developing them with literacy and skills. We must break down the barriers that silence us. WE must find our voice. Because if we do not overcome our hesitancy, so many others are consigned to living exploited and oppressed lives.

In this issue, we are featuring women who practice active compassion, who act effectively to help young women succeed, who stand up to privilege and the status quo on behalf of those who have not yet found their voices. By practicing empowerment, they are empowering others. By naming their own needs, they are helping other women speak.

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