

NINETY YEARS OF BRETHREN WOMEN IN MINISTRY

by Jerry R. Flora¹

When the Progressive wing of the German Baptist Brethren organized in 1882-83 as the Brethren Church, they moved quickly to grant women the privilege and responsibility of church leadership. The first General Conference met in 1882, the second in 1887, and the third in 1892, after which they met annually. By 1894 both the General Conference and most of the district conferences had passed resolutions favoring the equality of men and women in the church or the inclusion of women in the ranks of pastors and missionaries.²

The first woman was ordained in 1890, but no collection today contains the denomination's periodical, *The Brethren Evangelist*, for the years 1890-93. Therefore, this study of Brethren women in ministry must begin at 1894, the earliest year for which such record exists. The purpose of the article is not to argue for or against the right of women to be ordained or serve as pastors,³ but to describe as accurately as possible the activities of those who were recognized as ministers in the Brethren Church. The method will be to take "soundings" at fifteen-year intervals in the period 1894 to 1984, summarizing what was published in *The Brethren Evangelist*. Not every woman designated as a minister will be mentioned, but only those active in the fifteen-year increments.

1894

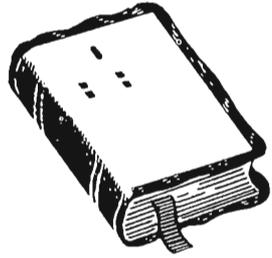
It has been estimated that, when the Brethren Church began in 1883, it had about 6,000 members. A dozen years later 12,700 members were reported in 173 congregations.⁴

(1) MARY MALINDA STERLING (1859-1933) of Masontown, Pennsylvania, was the first woman to be ordained in the Brethren Church (1890). She was also the first president of the national women's auxiliary, the Sisters' Society of Christian Endeavor (S.S.C.E.), which she led from its founding in 1887 until 1892. The year 1894 opened with a report that she had been holding revival meetings at Masontown and Middle Run in Fayette County, Pennsylvania, and had baptized two persons in the Monongahela River.⁵ The Middle Run meeting closed on January 30, with another convert who was to be baptized by her brother, Rev. A.J. Sterling.⁶

In June the denomination learned that she had spent seven months in evangelistic preaching in West Virginia and Pennsyl-



Vianna Detwiler



Mary Pence



*Dr. Florence
Newberry Gribble*

vania. During this time she had preached 207 sermons in 187 days, receiving 27 additions to the church, 18 of whom she herself baptized. She commented that the reception of "woman's preaching" was more favorable than she might have expected.⁷ Some indication of the truth of this was shown when Mary Sterling was invited to deliver the Sunday morning sermon at the 1894 General Conference.⁸

Prior to that, she had baptized four persons during a communion service at Top Sail, Pennsylvania.⁹ Her evangelistic activity was also considered newsworthy by the *Weekly Review*, a West Virginia publication which described her work.¹⁰ Toward the close of 1894 she reported that she had been able to organize a new Brethren church at Toll Gate, West Virginia, in Ritchie County, with 24 charter members.¹¹

(2) LAURA E. N. GROSSNICKLE (1858-1934), a native of Mapleville, Maryland, was the second woman to be ordained in the Brethren Church (1891). 1894 was the third year of her pastorate at Fairview, Indiana, near South Bend. During the winter she preached a short series of revival meetings at Elkhart, Indiana, with one public confession of faith resulting.¹² In May *The Brethren Evangelist* printed what Editor S. J. Harrison called "one of Sister Grossnickle's best sermons — one that has thrilled every audience that has ever heard her deliver it."¹³ The message, "What Think Ye of Christ?" was given four large pages of text in order to publish it in its entirety. The sermon describes Messianic prophecy and its fulfillment in Jesus, together with various reactions to Him in His own day. It then turns to how Jesus is perceived in our time, concluding with a ringing evangelistic challenge for hearers to make the Nazarene the Savior and Lord of their lives.¹⁴

On May 22, in the evening service at Loree, Indiana, Laura Grossnickle preached to the Indiana Ministerial Association what the reporter, Rev. R. R. Teeter, called "an inspiring sermon," and the following day led the ministers in a Bible study.¹⁵ In addition to serving the Fairview congregation, she also preached every other week at New Troy, Michigan, where she conducted a communion service on Saturday, June 2.¹⁶

In July, she published an article about the national women's work, "Our S.S.C.E.," in which she challenged women to attend the approaching General Conference and unselfishly support the fledgling organization.¹⁷ At Ashland College the next month Laura Grossnickle was elected president of the S.S.C.E., which also decided to send her among the churches as a field organizer. The auxiliary at this time reported thirty member societies.¹⁸ She continued to work as a pastor through the remainder of 1894,¹⁹ while preparing to begin her travel responsibilities January 1 from her

family home in Maryland. Before the year concluded she held a revival meeting in New Troy, receiving five confessions of faith in one week, bringing to 21 the additions to that church in 1894.²⁰ She also published an article on "How Shall the Brethren Church Attain a Higher Standard of Spirituality?" "The great secret," she wrote, "is a close walk with God. . . . Worshiping Him, we grow like Him."²¹

During her six months as S.S.C.E. field worker in 1895, Rev. Grossnickle traveled constantly, preaching nearly every night and twice on Sundays. From January through June she visited 77 congregations, 20 former societies, and organized 38 new S.S.C.E. groups.²²

(3) A third woman active in pastoral work during 1894 was ESTHER L. DICKEY, of Sidney, Indiana. Early in the year it was reported that a month-long "protracted meeting" she led at her church had resulted in twelve baptisms.²³ There were tensions, however, between Mrs. Dickey and the larger church, for in an open letter published in May she charged that the denomination was "locking arms with secret societies" and conforming to the world.²⁴ The following month *The Brethren Evangelist* published her article "For I Am Not Ashamed of the Gospel of Christ."²⁵ In August, Mrs. Dickey had the infrequent pastoral responsibility of conducting the funeral of another minister, Rev. Enos Sala,²⁶ after which her article "Born of God" appeared.²⁷ The issues which she raised earlier continued to disturb her, resulting in her withdrawal from the Brethren Church late in 1894.²⁸

(4) According to the denominational yearbook, LIZZIE MASTERS was pastor at Elkport, Iowa, from 1893 to 1899. Nothing to date is known of her service, except that in May 1894 *The Brethren Evangelist* published an article by her from Wood, Iowa, entitled "Perils Threaten God's Children." It contained a challenge for all ministers and teachers to be diligent in handling the Scriptures, lest they teach as doctrine the commandments of men (cf. Matt. 15:9)²⁹

(5) A fifth woman active in Brethren ministry during 1894 was CLARA MYERS FLORA (1850-ca. 1920). A native of Illinois, she, like her husband Noah, was ordained, and they always served together in a team ministry. The first issue of *The Brethren Evangelist* for 1894 contained her article "Almost a Christian" and the report that she was preaching regularly at Brooklyn, Iowa, a mission church of the Illiokota District Conference.³⁰ The two ministers held a revival meeting at Brooklyn which resulted in 21 confessions of faith, Clara Flora preaching half of the time.³¹

From their home in Dallas Center, Iowa, she also traveled regularly to Leon and New Virginia for preaching appointments.³² Her

practice at such places was to arrive on Saturday, preach Saturday night and again on Sunday morning and evening.³³ On June 9 she assisted Isaac Thomas in the communion service at Leon on Saturday evening, then preached on Sunday morning.³⁴

In midsummer it was announced that Clara Flora, whose sermons often received complimentary notice in reports from the churches, would preach the opening sermon at the Illiokota Conference in Milledgeville, Illinois. The only other scheduled preacher was the noted orator-evangelist, Stephen H. Bashor.³⁵ On her trip to the conference (a distance of 216 miles) she preached five times in five days.³⁶ Shortly afterward she received seven public confessions of faith during one weekend of preaching at Leon, Iowa.³⁷

Late in 1894 *The Brethren Evangelist* printed her article "Inconsistent Prayers," in which she criticized the practice in some congregations of interceding for lawmakers but refusing them church membership.³⁸ The same issue of the periodical reported that she and her husband had preached a series of services at Leon from September 30 to October 18. Audiences were too large for the space available, causing some persons to go home without hearing the speaker. But the meetings resulted in 33 confessions of faith, 31 of whom were baptized.³⁹

(6) ETTA TOMBAUGH of Rochester, Indiana, also appeared in the ministerial lists of *The Brethren Annual* from 1894 to 1898, but nothing is known at this date of her pastoral activity.

(7) The year 1894 saw the beginning of the ministerial service of SARAH (SADIE) FREAS GIBBONS (1864-1920), who was ordained not long after the death of her first husband, Charles Gibbons, in 1888. Writing from Independence, Kansas, she produced an article on faith, hope, and love which she titled "Three Sisters." The home of these sisters is in the heart, she wrote, with God as their Father and righteous works their offspring.⁴⁰

1909

Fifteen years later Rev. Henry R. Holsinger, the founding leader of the Brethren Church, had been removed by death, and the denomination was just over a quarter-century of age. Membership that year was 18,607 persons distributed in 219 congregations,⁴¹ a considerable increase from 1894.

(1) The former Laura Grossnickle was now LAURA GROSSNICKLE HEDRICK, having been married in 1898 to George W. Hedrick, a widower of Dayton, Virginia. She stepped down at that time from the presidency of the Sisters' Society, and was serving in 1909 as secretary of the national organization. In February *The Brethren Evangelist* published her article "The Bible a Book for the Home," in which she wrote that the Bible is preeminently the book

of the home because it meets the sorrows and hungers of every person. It does this by revealing the Savior who draws human hearts to Himself for sympathy while at the same time filling them with hope and joy.⁴²

In June she was a ministerial delegate at the Maryland-Northern Virginia District Conference, where she read a paper on the work of the S.S.C.E. The reception was so favorable that it was "ordered sent to the *Evangelist* for publication."⁴³ At the General Conference in August she was reelected national secretary. But George Hedrick's health was poor, so in late 1909 he and his wife traveled to Florida to investigate buying property there.⁴⁴ "Florida As We Saw It" contained Laura Hedrick's announcement that she and her husband, together with Daniel Crofford of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, had purchased 300 acres west of Hallandale, near Fort Lauderdale, and would soon move there.⁴⁵

(2) Noah and CLARA FLORA continued their team ministry in the state of Iowa, noting that the congregation at Brooklyn once numbered 200 members but had run down. In mid-1909 Clara Flora was pastoring there and also at Udell; at the same time, together with her husband, she was caring for the Leon, Iowa, congregation since their pastor, Sadie Gibbons, had left.⁴⁶ For the Iliokota District Conference in October, Clara Flora was scheduled to give a half-hour of "Bible readings and comments" before the communion service.⁴⁷ The conference met at the Brethren mission in Chicago with 60 present when she spoke on "The Sacrifice of Christ for Us."⁴⁸

(3) SADIE GIBBONS started the year 1909 as pastor at Leon, Iowa, "where she has been for quite a long time," Editor A. D. Gnagey observed.⁴⁹ During January she held a two-week revival meeting at Garwin, Iowa, with one confession of faith resulting.⁵⁰ On February 4, she became pastor at Portis, Kansas.⁵¹ In the first month of her work there she reported four accessions to that church's membership, three of them by baptism.⁵²

The congregation quickly responded to her leadership, surprising her shortly afterward with gifts in appreciation of her work.⁵³ By mid-June she was able to report four more additions by confession and baptism.⁵⁴ In September she sent word to *The Brethren Evangelist* that, since June, ten more members had joined the Portis congregation.⁵⁵ In October she spoke twice to the Kanemorado District Conference in its meeting at Carleton, Nebraska, first on "The Country Church; Its Needs and How to Supply Them" and then on "The Personal Worker: Who He Is." She observed that, fifty years before, all personal workers were men, but now women too could engage in this form of evangelism.⁵⁶ Her pastoral activities also included performing a wedding late in the year.⁵⁷

(4) MARY MELISSA WAGEMAN BAUMAN (1876-1909) came from the Methodist Church into the Brethren and married Rev. Louis S. Bauman, both in 1898. She was ordained the following year by the Roann, Indiana, congregation, and in 1906 organized the first local Sisterhood of Mary and Martha for the girls of the First Brethren Church in Philadelphia. From there in January 1909 she wrote "Childhood's Prayer All Wrong," one of several responses to criticisms of the traditional bedtime prayer "Now I lay me down to sleep . . ." She noted that her son Glenn, who had died at an early age, was comforted rather than frightened by the line "If I should die before I wake."⁵⁸

The denomination learned in mid-summer that Mary Bauman was very ill with "a full developed case of typhoid malaria,"⁵⁹ from which she died on September 12. She was buried in Philadelphia's historic Germantown cemetery next to the ashes of her son.⁶⁰ In December *The Brethren Evangelist* posthumously published her final article, "Loyalty to the Holy Spirit," in which she wrote, "Oh, know that the Spirit has come to make our daily lives an exhibition of divine power, and a revelation of what God can do for and through His children. And the Spirit *will* come to an open, praying, willing heart. It is not so much now and then a special gift, but He comes morning by morning, hour by hour, step by step. Just as the branch gets sap from the vine, unconsciously and unceasingly, so comes the Holy Spirit to us from the Heavenly Vine."⁶¹

(5) Not much is known of details in the service of LOVINA ELLEN YOUNG MEYERS (1862-1933), the wife of Rev. M. C. Meyers.⁶² The only report of her in the denominational periodical for 1909 was in January, when it noted that the Meyerses had moved from Pittsburgh to Masontown, Pennsylvania, to take the church there.⁶³

(6) According to *The Brethren Annual*, ANTONIA WALKER, an ordained minister, was pastor at Beaconsfield, Iowa, near Leon, for at least fifteen years (1902-17). 1909 would have been about the mid-point of her service there, but nothing more is known at present of her work.⁶⁴

(7) VIANNA DETWILER (1876?-1921) was one of thirteen children in a family which moved from Ohio to Ridgely, Maryland, about 1881. She was ordained in 1901 while president of the S.S.C.E. (1898-1905), after which she worked at the Brethren mission in Montreal, Quebec. Early in 1909 she spent over a month in Toronto in the interests of the church, then returned to Montreal to work with Dr. C. F. Yoder, superintendent of the mission.⁶⁵ Having studied at the Maryland State Normal School, Ashland College, and the University of Chicago, she was uniquely qualified to write in the symposium "Where College Training Has Been Indispensable."⁶⁶

She continued to serve sacrificially in the Montreal mission and to appeal for funds through channels open to her.⁶⁷ In October *The Brethren Evangelist* published her article "Woman's Work for Christ," in which she maintained that, while Christianity does not set woman free from home obligations, it does free her to serve in a Christian ministry where Galatians 3:28 is true.⁶⁸ Later that month she left on a trip that took her to England, Scotland, and France.⁶⁹

(8) From 1906 until 1908 the name of ADA GARBER DRUSHAL (1881-1975) was included in the ministerial lists as a missionary-evangelist along with her well-known husband, Rev. G. E. Drushal. Together they had founded the Brethren mission at Lost Creek, Kentucky, in October 1905. The only notice of her work in 1909 came in March, when Samuel Kilhefner wrote to *The Brethren Evangelist* that she had preached at Lost Creek with "sledgehammer blows."⁷⁰

(9) As will be noted later, it is possible that MARGARET HOOVER (d. 1921) was in active service about this time, although no dates for her work are yet available.

(10) MRS. T. E. RICHARDS was reported in *The Brethren Annual* for 1907 through 1910 to be pastor with her husband at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. It is assumed that she was ordained since her name appeared without designation in lists where unordained ministers were specially noted. *The Brethren Evangelist* contained no report of her pastoral activities during 1909.

(11) BERTHA MAY BELL was first mentioned in the 1908 ministerial list, but as unordained. In June 1909 it was announced that she would take the place of Etta Warvel Bowman, accompanying the C. F. Yoders in opening a Brethren mission work in Argentina.⁷¹ They sailed on August 11 aboard the *S. S. Teutonic*.⁷² Ten weeks later *The Brethren Evangelist* carried Miss Bell's letter describing their arrival in Brazil on the way to Argentina.⁷³

(12) ALFRETTA (ETTA) WARVEL BOWMAN, president of the S.S.C.E. from 1906 to 1911, began the year 1909 as pastor at the Brethren Church in Akron, Indiana. In February she became pastor at Claypool, Indiana.⁷⁴ She was planning on missionary service in South America with Dr. and Mrs. Yoder,⁷⁵ but by June it was evident that she would not be able to go because of her father's terminal illness.⁷⁶ Bertha May Bell would be her substitute. After about six months in the Claypool church, Mrs. Bowman left⁷⁷ and was reelected national S.S.C.E. president at the General Conference in August.⁷⁸

(13) MARGARET A. COOKE became pastor at the Brush Valley and Glad Run, Pennsylvania, churches early in 1909.⁷⁹ Her leadership caused the former congregation to prosper so that it was said,

"This is the greatest place for everybody to go to church, in the Brotherhood" (L. S. Bauman).⁸⁰ No more was reported of her work there that year, except that on September 1 she concluded her pastorate.⁸¹

(14) MRS. P. J. JENNINGS made her first appearance in *The Brethren Annual* for 1909. She was pastor at Allegheny and Oriskany, Virginia, while her husband pastored the Bethlehem Brethren Church at Harrisonburg. However, no report of her pastoral activity was published during the year 1909.

(15) The name of MAUDE CRIPE (1886-1976) — later to become Mrs. Leonard Webb during her missionary service in Argentina (1911-17) — first appeared in the ministerial list of 1909, where she was designated as an unordained minister. She was a missionary at Lost Creek, Kentucky, when she spoke to the Ashland, Ohio, S.S.C.E. in the spring of that year.⁸²

1924

Fifteen years later a new situation confronted the churches: the aftermath of World War I, the Russian revolution, the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, the granting of woman suffrage, the coming of Prohibition, the social outbreak that marked the Roaring 'Twenties, and the financial uncertainty that produced the Great Depression. The Brethren Church continued its growth (to 21,848 in 1920 and 22,682 in 1927), but the number of congregations was declining (to 171 in 1920 and 159 in 1927).⁸³ The denomination was forty years old, and a new generation of leaders were serving in the changed atmosphere of 1924.

(1) Most prominent, perhaps, was DR. FLORENCE NEWBERRY GRIBBLE (1880-1942), a medical missionary to French Equatorial Africa. After working as a physician in the U.S. and in Africa, she was ordained in 1917 and began her service with the Brethren Church upon her return to the field in 1918. Her husband of ten years, James Gribble, died in 1923. A prolific writer, Dr. Gribble contributed nothing to the denomination's periodical in the year after her husband's death except letters detailing the nature of her continuing medical work. Five years later she had completed the 426-page manuscript of *Undaunted Hope*, a biography of James Gribble.⁸⁴

(2) NORAL PEARL BRACKEN DAVIS (1888-1935) was living in her home town, Johnstown, Pennsylvania, during 1924. Having pastored briefly following her ordination, she then was appointed National Superintendent of the Children's Division for the denomination. In that capacity during 1921 she had visited 54 church schools⁸⁵ and in 1924 continued to write curriculum materials for children's workers.

(3) MARY PENCE of Limestone, Tennessee, was ordained in 1919 after teaching about six years at Lost Creek, Kentucky. Through most of the 'twenties she was pastor of the Telford Chapel at Limestone, near Johnson City. Early in 1924 *The Brethren Evangelist* carried her article "A Church Ill — the Lack of Worship," in which she wrote, "The church today is too busy about much serving to sit at the feet of Jesus to worship. . . . Prayer has become almost wholly petitions with little praise. . . . Sociability is a good thing in the house of God, but if there is not the proper reverence and the attitude of worship, the sociability will not be fellowship in the Lord Jesus, but merely that of the world."⁸⁶ Writing again in November, Rev. Pence noted that the Limestone congregation had been organized in 1910, but said nothing about her five years as its pastor.⁸⁷

(4) A native of Abey, Lebanon, EMMA ABOUD (1880-1967) came to the United States around 1894. Using her knowledge of Middle Eastern customs and adopting native dress at times, she became a well-known evangelist in the Brethren Church beginning in 1920. In February 1924, Rev. E. B. Shaver reported on the successful public meetings she had conducted in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, resulting in 25 confessions of faith at Maurertown and 20 at the St. Luke church.⁸⁸

Similar results followed her effort of three weeks at the Bethlehem congregation near Harrisonburg, Virginia,⁸⁹ and the New Lebanon, Ohio, church near Dayton.⁹⁰ In early October *The Brethren Evangelist* reported another successful series of services at Mathias, West Virginia. Rev. Arthur Snider, who described those meetings, wrote, "Almost every night hundreds and sometimes a half thousand were turned away because of not sufficient room, and yet the church holds between four and five hundred."⁹¹ The close of the year saw an announcement that she was now available for further evangelistic meetings, and could be contacted at Dayton, Ohio, or Buena Vista, Virginia.⁹² She continued this activity through the decade of the 'twenties and resumed it in 1940.

(5) GRACE P. SRACK, the widow of L. E. Srack (1867-1920), had planned to work with her husband as a Brethren missionary in Africa. But he died only one month after the announcement was made to the denomination. Mrs. Srack pastored briefly, then taught at the Lost Creek, Kentucky, mission beginning in 1922. During the Southern California Bible Conference in July 1924, she conducted a school of missions for the Brethren in attendance.⁹³

1939

The next fifteen years brought growth and tension to the Brethren Church. Membership increased to 29,389 in 1939, but the

number of congregations continued to decline to 152 in that year (apparently about sixty congregations disbanded between 1900 and 1930).⁹⁴ The tensions, which had their roots back in the 'teens, produced two groups who have been called by later students the Brethrenists and the Fundamentalists.⁹⁵ The General Conference of 1939 divided into two denominations. The latter group (now the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches) retained control of nearly all the missionary program, both home and foreign, while the former (the Brethren Church) controlled Ashland College and Seminary. The "Grace group" therefore found it necessary to build a new educational institution at Winona Lake, Indiana; the "Ashland group," beginning anew with the Yoders in Argentina and the Drushals in Kentucky, had to develop a new program of missionary outreach. Much of what *The Brethren Evangelist* published in 1939 was related to the controversy as the denomination drifted into the maelstrom.

(1) DR. FLORENCE GRIBBLE continued to write frequent reports of her activity in Africa. In addition, two articles by her were published in 1939. "Thanksgiving" was an address that she delivered at the Bassai Conference on Thanksgiving Day of 1938, in which she reflected on thirty years of service in African missions.⁹⁶ "The Lord's Preserves" described divine safekeeping in her experience on the basis of Psalm 121.⁹⁷

(2) FLORENCE BICKEL, a registered nurse from Elkhart, Indiana, joined the African missionary team in 1924. She was ordained in her home church on Christmas Day of 1922, then took specialized training in France before proceeding to Africa. During the early months of 1939 she was on furlough in the United States, where she spoke in January to the Mid-Year conference of Southern California at the Second Brethren Church of Los Angeles.⁹⁸ Shortly afterward, while preparing to return to the mission field, she wrote "Back Again to My Beloved Black Saints."⁹⁹ She left New York on April 20 and arrived on the field June 13, returning to her work at the Bellevue Mission Station.¹⁰⁰

(3) LAURA EVANGELINE LARSON WAGNER went to Argentina in 1931 as part of the missionary effort there, and was included in *The Brethren Annual* list of ministers from 1932 through 1935. She was the last missionary to go to South America prior to the division of the denomination. While serving there she met and married Rev. Ricardo Wagner. Mrs. Larson-Wagner (as her name often appeared) wrote two contrasting articles published in 1939. The first was "Indifference, the Missionary's Problem in Latin America." "Our Lord once declared," she wrote, "that a spiritual night is coming during which it will be *impossible* for any man to work. That night is *almost here*."¹⁰¹ The second, "Darkness Reced-

ing Before the Night," offered the other side of the picture in its report of victories won on the Argentine field.¹⁰²

1954

"The Ashland group" survived the division of the denomination, but lost the greater part of its young leaders and workers, including most of the women serving as missionaries. The membership in 1940 was put at 17,282 persons in about 100 congregations. By 1955 it was listed as 18,672 in 99 congregations.¹⁰³ In 1954 no women were working as pastors, no ordained women were in missionary service, and only one had been ordained since 1939.

(1) EDNA PUTERBAUGH NICHOLAS (d. 1967) was ordained in 1928 at Elkhart, Indiana. She did some evangelistic preaching, occasional pulpit supply, and served for many years as secretary of the Elkhart church. In 1954 *The Brethren Evangelist* published a devotional article by her, "I Go A Fishing," in which she observed that, more than fishing, what Jesus' disciples needed after Easter was to see Him. Seeing Him, they loved Him, and loving Him, they served Him.¹⁰⁴

(2) LORETTA CARRITHERS is another Brethren woman who worked in a team ministry with her husband. Following the division of 1939-40, she was appointed Superintendent of Children's Work in 1940. In that capacity she wrote a weekly column for children in the denomination's periodical under the name "Aunt Loretta" until 1944. At that time she took full pastoral responsibility for the Mansfield, Ohio, congregation in the absence of her husband, who was commissioned a U.S. Army chaplain. After several years as a licensed minister, she was ordained in 1948 at Peru, Indiana. Elmer and Loretta Carrithers served as co-pastors again at Mansfield from 1950 through 1953. In 1954 they had recently moved to Des Moines, Iowa, where they have lived ever since.¹⁰⁵

(3) In a July 1954 article, Brethren antiquarian Freeman H. Ankrum described the Berachah Church four miles east of Glenford, Ohio, and two miles south of Brownsville. There as a boy he had heard MARGARET (MAGGIE) HOOVER as "among those who supplied the pulpit from time to time,"¹⁰⁶ but today nothing more is known of her activity (see no. 9 above under 1909).

1969

The 'sixties were a crucial decade in American history witnessing, among other things, the Cuban missile crisis; the murders of President John F. Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Senator Robert Kennedy; the escalation of involvement in the Viet Nam War; and the social revolution which affected many aspects of American life until today. The denomination's statistics for 1970

showed a membership of 17,327 in 116 local churches.¹⁰⁷ In 1969 no Brethren woman was serving as a pastor anywhere in the United States. No ordained Brethren woman was working on a mission field. *The Brethren Evangelist* had no articles to publish by the women recognized as ministers.

The only item related to the subject of this study was "Power of the Female in Christian Influence."¹⁰⁸ It was a lengthy unsigned review of R. Pierce Beaver's 1968 book *All Loves Excelling* (revised and reissued in 1980 as *American Protestant Women in World Mission*). Beaver amassed an impressive wealth of data to document the role the women historically played in advancing the Christian missionary cause, especially when leadership in their home churches was, for whatever reason, denied to them.

1984

The fifteen years following 1969 saw little change in the Brethren Church's employment of women in ministerial capacity. The 1979 membership figure was 15,082 persons in 123 congregations,¹⁰⁹ and by 1983 that had become 14,424 in 126 churches.

The decade of the 'seventies was without question a period of heightening sensitivity to the role of women in the church and in society. The General Conference of 1974 adopted a recommendation to "encourage women and men to engage in team ministry as ordained persons or as lay persons."¹¹⁰ About three years later a few young women studying at Ashland Theological Seminary began to investigate the history of Brethren women in ministry.¹¹¹

In December 1983, JENNIFER JONES RAY was ordained together with her husband James at Roann, Indiana, making her the first Brethren woman so designated in the quarter-century since 1957.¹¹² She appeared before the Brethren Pastors' Conference on Faith and Order in April 1983 to speak of her experiences as a woman in ministry.¹¹³ The Pastors' Conference considered several presentations on the ordination of women in the Brethren Church, as did the National Ministerial Association meetings at the 1983 General Conference and the 1984 Pastors' Conference.¹¹⁴

Out of this extended discussion a six-man committee was appointed to see if a consensus could be reached. Three of the committee were known to oppose ordaining women, and three favored it. The committee brought to the 1984 General Conference ministers' sessions a recommendation that, since "the local church is ultimately responsible for the calling, licensure, and ordination of the candidate for ministry," each congregation should reach a decision on the question and periodically review its policies. The committee further recommended that, while district ministerial examining boards and the National Ordination Council "examine candidates

in the areas of personal life, theology, ethics, and personal habits," they should remain neutral on matters of sex, race, and national origin. Therefore, the final word on Brethren women in ministry would rest with each local congregation according to their understanding of Scripture. After discussion over a period of several days, the recommendation was defeated by a vote of 39 for and 45 against. Whether women will be admitted to the Brethren ministry will continue to be decided by the various district examining boards and the National Ordination Council.

Concluding Observations

We have learned that, during the first generation of the Brethren Church's life, a few women (no more than fifteen at any time) played a significant part in the denomination's formal ministry. That practice declined in the two decades between World War I and the division of 1939-40. Most of the shrinking number worked in foreign missions; very few served as pastors. Many members who have grown up in the church since that time have no knowledge at all of women in the official ministry of the church.

What will account for this change in Brethren practice? A number of possible answers suggest themselves. (1) The principal historian among the Grace Brethren has offered the opinion that better interpretation of Scripture brought about the shift.¹¹⁵ (2) Another possibility notes that, beginning about the time of the great international missionary conference at Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910, increasing calls went out to the churches for men to take leadership lest the heroic element of Christian faith be feminized.¹¹⁶ (3) Still another suggestion observes the sociological change which occurred as, through the 'twenties and 'thirties, the number of available congregations declined while the denomination's membership increased. Some of the smaller churches, formerly pastored by women, were combined to form larger congregations or allowed to die out altogether.¹¹⁷ (4) The influence of Protestant fundamentalism was considerable in the Brethren Church, both before and after the 1939-40 division. Since fundamentalism has generally looked askance at female leadership in the church, this may help to explain what happened.¹¹⁸ (5) Reacting to the extreme social gospel movement, Biblical conservatism turned severely inward between 1920 and 1940, coming out of its shell only partially between 1940 and 1960.¹¹⁹ Acceptance of women in leadership prior to World War I had been part of the evangelical-led social action which began in the mid-1800s and climaxed in 1919-20 with the suffrage and prohibition amendments to the U.S. Constitution. In the aftermath of those victories considerable energy dissipated both in the church and in society.¹²⁰

Much more remains to be done, however, before any of these — or, more likely, any combination of them — can give a definitive answer to the question, Why? Hopefully, continuing and future research will be able to discover and arrange all the pieces of the mosaic.

FOOTNOTES

¹The writer is happy to acknowledge the assistance of his wife Julia Ann in the research for this article.

²For details, see Jerry R. Flora, "Brethren Women in Ministry: Century One," *Ashland Theological Journal* 15 (1982): 19-20.

³The author has stated his position in "The Ordination of Women in the Brethren Church," an unpublished paper prepared for the 1983 Brethren Pastors' Conference on Faith and Order.

⁴Statistics are those summarized in the magisterial study of Dale R. Stoffer, "The Background and Development of Thought and Practice in the German Baptist Brethren (Dunker) and The Brethren (Progressive) Churches (c. 1650-1979)" (Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1980), p. 531. See also Stoffer's article "The Brethren Church 1883-1983," *The Brethren Evangelist* 105 (August 1983): 14-18.

⁵*The Brethren Evangelist* (hereafter abbreviated *BE*) 16 (January 24, 1894): 12.

⁶*BE* 16 (February 14, 1894): 13.

⁷*BE* 16 (June 6, 1894): 12.

⁸*BE* 16 (September 5, 1894): 2.

⁹*BE* 16 (October 3, 1894): 13.

¹⁰*BE* 16 (December 12, 1894): 9.

¹¹*BE* 16 (December 19, 1894): 3; *BE* 16 (December 26, 1894): 13.

¹²*BE* 16 (May 30, 1894): 11.

¹³*BE* 16 (May 9, 1894): 1.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 4-7.

¹⁵*BE* 16 (June 6, 1894): 11.

¹⁶*BE* 16 (May 23, 1894): 13.

¹⁷*BE* 16 (July 18, 1894): 6-7.

¹⁸*BE* 16 (September 5, 1894): 3.

¹⁹*BE* 16 (September 12, 1894): 14.

²⁰*BE* 16 (November 28, 1894): 10.

²¹*BE* 16 (September 19, 1894): 2.

²²*The Brethren Annual*, 1896, p. 7.

²³*BE* 16 (January 10, 1894): 28.

²⁴*BE* 16 (May 2, 1894): 14.

²⁵*BE* 16 (June 27, 1894): 5-6.

²⁶*BE* 16 (August 8, 1894): 14.

²⁷*BE* 16 (August 22, 1894): 7.

²⁸*BE* 16 (December 12, 1894): 8-9 contains a letter from her and reply by Editor A. D. Gnagey.

²⁹*BE* 16 (May 30, 1894): 7.

³⁰*BE* 16 (January 3, 1894): 7, 9.

³¹*BE* 16 (January 31, 1894): 11.

³²*BE* 16 (March 21, 1894): 14.

³³*BE* 16 (June 6, 1894): 13.

- ³⁴BE 16 (June 27, 1894): 12.
- ³⁵BE 16 (July 18, 1894): 21; BE 16 (September 26, 1894): 12.
- ³⁶BE 16 (September 5, 1894): 13.
- ³⁷BE 16 (September 19, 1894): 12.
- ³⁸BE 16 (November 7, 1894): 6.
- ³⁹Ibid.
- ⁴⁰BE 16 (March 28, 1894): 5-6.
- ⁴¹Stoffer, "Background and Development," pp. 531-32.
- ⁴²BE 31 (February 10, 1909): 6.
- ⁴³BE 31 (June 16, 1909): 16. It subsequently appeared in the issue of June 30, 1909.
- ⁴⁴BE 31 (November 10, 1909): 16.
- ⁴⁵BE 31 (December 29, 1909): 11, 15.
- ⁴⁶BE 31 (July 7, 1909): 13.
- ⁴⁷BE 31 (September 29, 1909): 14.
- ⁴⁸BE 31 (November 3, 1909): 13.
- ⁴⁹BE 31 (January 6, 1909): 13.
- ⁵⁰BE 31 (January 27, 1909): 8.
- ⁵¹BE 31 (February 10, 1909): 6.
- ⁵²BE 31 (March 10, 1909): 8, 14.
- ⁵³BE 31 (March 24, 1909): 16.
- ⁵⁴BE 31 (June 23, 1909): 8.
- ⁵⁵BE 31 (September 22, 1909): 8.
- ⁵⁶BE 31 (August 25, 1909): 15; BE 31 (November 10, 1909): 12.
- ⁵⁷BE 31 (December 8, 1909): 16.
- ⁵⁸BE 31 (January 13, 1909): 6.
- ⁵⁹BE 31 (August 25, 1909): 8.
- ⁶⁰BE 31 (September 29, 1909): 16.
- ⁶¹BE 31 (December 1, 1909): 4-5.
- ⁶²See Flora, "Brethren Women in Ministry," pp. 23-24.
- ⁶³BE 31 (January 6, 1909): 16.
- ⁶⁴See also Flora, "Brethren Women in Ministry," p. 24.
- ⁶⁵BE 31 (May 5, 1909): 12.
- ⁶⁶BE 31 (June 16, 1909): 7.
- ⁶⁷BE 31 (July 28, 1909): 14.
- ⁶⁸BE 31 (October 6, 1909): 11.
- ⁶⁹BE 31 (October 13, 1909): 8, 14; BE 31 (November 10, 1909): 14; BE 31 (December 8, 1909): 8.
- ⁷⁰BE 31 (March 17, 1909): 17.
- ⁷¹BE 31 (June 2, 1909): 12.
- ⁷²BE 31 (August 11, 1909): 8.
- ⁷³BE 31 (October 27, 1909): 10.
- ⁷⁴BE 31 (February 24, 1909): 8.
- ⁷⁵BE 31 (February 10, 1909): 15.
- ⁷⁶BE 31 (June 2, 1909): 12.
- ⁷⁷BE 31 (July 7, 1909): 8.
- ⁷⁸BE 31 (September 15, 1909): 9.
- ⁷⁹BE 31 (February 3, 1909): 14.
- ⁸⁰BE 31 (March 10, 1909): 14.
- ⁸¹BE 31 (August 11, 1909): 15.
- ⁸²BE 31 (May 12, 1909): 6.
- ⁸³Stoffer, "Background and Development," pp. 683-84.
- ⁸⁴BE 51 (August 24, 1929): 12.
- ⁸⁵BE 44 (June 21, 1922): 10.

- ⁸⁶BE 46 (February 6, 1924): 8-9.
- ⁸⁷BE 46 (November 19, 1924): 13.
- ⁸⁸BE 46 (February 27, 1924): 13.
- ⁸⁹BE 46 (April 16, 1924): 14.
- ⁹⁰BE 46 (April 23, 1924): 13.
- ⁹¹BE 46 (October 8, 1924): 13.
- ⁹²BE 46 (December 10, 1924): 15.
- ⁹³BE 46 (August 13, 1924): 16.
- ⁹⁴Stoffer, "Background and Development," p. 684.
- ⁹⁵Ibid., pp. 680-739. See also his article "The Brethren Church 1883-1983," BE 105 (August 1983): 16-17.
- ⁹⁶BE 61 (May 6, 1939): 12, 18-19.
- ⁹⁷BE 61 (June 3, 1939): 7-8.
- ⁹⁸BE 61 (February 11, 1939): 9.
- ⁹⁹BE 61 (March 4, 1939): 15.
- ¹⁰⁰BE 61 (August 19, 1939): 13.
- ¹⁰¹BE 61 (April 1, 1939): 9-10.
- ¹⁰²BE 61 (June 3, 1939): 13.
- ¹⁰³Stoffer, "Background and Development," p. 744. For a careful analysis of the division in its sociological as well as historical, philosophical, and theological aspects, see Dennis Martin, "Ashland College versus Ashland Seminary (1921-37): Prelude to Schism," *Brethren Life and Thought* 21 (Winter 1976): 37-50, and "What Has Divided the Brethren Church," *Brethren Life and Thought* 21 (Spring 1976): 107-119.
- ¹⁰⁴BE 76 (June 19, 1954): 10.
- ¹⁰⁵BE 76 (September 19, 1953): 15.
- ¹⁰⁶BE 76 (July 10, 1954): 4-6, 8-9.
- ¹⁰⁷Stoffer, "Background and Development," p. 744.
- ¹⁰⁸BE 91 (January 18, 1969): 13-16.
- ¹⁰⁹Stoffer, "Background and Development," p. 744.
- ¹¹⁰*The Brethren Annual*, 1974, p. 26.
- ¹¹¹The first was probably Susan White [Hyland], "The Sisters of the Brethren: The Traditional Role of Women in the Brethren Church," 1977.
- ¹¹²Anne Black, the wife of Rev. E. J. Black, was ordained at Muncie, Indiana, in 1957. Two years later she and her husband withdrew from the denomination.
- ¹¹³Jennifer Ray, "Reflections by a Woman in Ministry," unpublished paper for the 1983 Brethren Pastors' Conference on Faith and Order.
- ¹¹⁴In addition to the items cited above in nn. 3 and 113, the following papers were discussed: P. Kent Bennett, "Ordination of Christian Pastors"; Gene A. Eckerley, "The Role of Women in Relation to Ordination"; David Kerner, "Leadership Selection Models Major Study: Ordination"; Terry L. Lodico, "The Role of Women in the Leadership of the Church"; and Jack L. Oxenrider, "The New Testament Practice of Women in Ministry."
- ¹¹⁵Homer A. Kent, Sr., *Conquering Frontiers: A History of the Brethren Church (The National Fellowship of Brethren Churches)*, rev. ed. (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1972), p. 121.
- ¹¹⁶There are many details in successive volumes of *The Brethren Evangelist* to warrant investigating this idea.
- ¹¹⁷See the research summarized in the articles by Martin, cited above, n. 103 (especially p. 38), and Stoffer, "Background and Development," p. 532 (especially n. 24).
- ¹¹⁸For a general analysis, see George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism*

1870-1925 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

¹¹⁹Cf., for example, Richard V. Pierard, "The Great Eclipse: The Rise and Fall and Rise of Evangelical Activism," *Eternity* (February 1984): 16-19.

¹²⁰A good introduction will be found in Donald W. Dayton, *Discovering An Evangelical Heritage* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).