

**THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA  
ARCHIVES**

**FINDING AID #38**

**ORDINATION OF WOMEN**

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## Introduction

This finding aid describes the records of the Committee on the Place of Women in the Church and the Special Task Force on Liberty of Conscience in Participation in the Ordination of Women. The records consist of approximately 2 cm. of printed material produced by the two committees for distribution to presbyteries or collected as reference material. The Acts and Proceedings of the General Assemblies, 1953-1966 and 1979-1982 contain minutes and reports relating to the issues around the ordination of women.

The records were re-catalogued in December 1988 by Elspeth Reid.

The finding aid is listed as FA-WOMEN.

## Historical Sketch

The Special Committee re. the Place of Women was appointed by the 1953 General Assembly as a result of an Overture from the Synod of Manitoba which noted that:

*as Presbyterians, we have failed to give women equal status and responsibilities in the Church and have thereby neglected to take advantage of a vast potential of Christian power and leadership, and...that the question of the status of women in positions of leadership in The Presbyterian Church In Canada needs clarification to the end that the Church may recognize the teaching of Scripture that in Christ there is neither male nor female...*

The 1954 Assembly instructed the Committee to consider the question of the ordination of women and to take into consultation representative women of the Church. The 1956 General Assembly authorized the transmission of the report to presbyteries along with questions on the ordination of women. As a result of the unfavourable response of presbyteries and presbyterials of the W.M.S., the committee recommended in 1956 that specific action on the ordination of women be deferred. Following this, the committee turned to the issue of the ordination of deaconesses and women missionaries, partly in response to a proposal from Formosa to ordain women missionaries there, and the issue of representation of women in the church courts, perhaps without ordination. The Committee proposed the setting up of Presbytery and Synod Councils with equal representation of women and men but this failed to meet with the approval of presbyteries. In 1961 the Committee on Articles of Faith was instructed by General Assembly to study the doctrine of woman, and this was done in co-operation with the Committee on the Place of Women in the Church. The committee then produced a study booklet on the issue for the use of the Church and recommended in 1964 that women should be eligible for ordination and have the right to serve in the courts of the Church. These recommendations were sent down to presbyteries for study. In 1965 similar recommendations were sent down to presbyteries under the Barrier Act and in 1966 the General Assembly passed a declaratory Act enabling women to be eligible for ordination to the Eldership and the Ministry of Word and Sacrament, and the Committee on the Place of Women in the Church was discharged.

The Special Task Force on Liberty of Conscience in the Ordination of Women was appointed by the General Assembly of 1981 and reported to the General Assembly of 1982. The Task Force was set up as a result of overtures, petitions and memorials from across the Church sent to the Assemblies of 1979, 1980 and 1981. In 1979, the Presbytery of Montreal submitted a memorial and Presbyterian College, Montreal submitted recommendations, which led to the appointment of a task force by the Board of Ministry to examine discrimination against women and to educate congregations, sessions, presbyteries and other agencies of the Church in the concept of the partnership of women and men. The Board of Ministry reported on the task force's work to the 1980 General Assembly. Also in 1980, however, overtures and memorials were sent to the General Assembly by the Presbytery of East Toronto and two sessions within its bounds, the Synod of Toronto & Kingston and the Presbytery of Miramichi, concerning the necessity for

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ordained ministers to participate in the ordination of women, and questioning whether the liberty of conscience as defined in the Westminster Confession of Faith applied to this issue. The General Assembly set up a Special Committee re. Overtures 3, 5, 10, 30, Memorial No.1 and Appeal of Mr. Codling, to deal with these questions. The Special Committee reported back to the 1980 Assembly, affirming the right of women to be eligible for ordination and the necessity for all ministers to participate in this, but suggesting a ten year period of grace for those already ordained ministers to accept the position of the church. There were a number of recorded dissents, which the committee responded to during the 1980 Assembly. Also, the Committee on Church Doctrine was asked to study the issue of liberty of conscience and report to the 1981 General Assembly. In 1981 the Committee on Church Doctrine reported but the Assembly also had to deal with another forty-five petitions, memorials and overtures on the subject. A second special committee was set up to deal with these overtures, which recommended the establishment of the Special Task Force on Liberty of Conscience in the Participation in the Ordination of Women. The Special Task Force presented a majority and a minority report to the 1982 General Assembly. The majority report recommended the passing of a Declaratory Act, stating that

*Ministers and elders already ordained and inducted within the Presbyterian Church in Canada have freedom of belief on the question of the ordination of women but do not have freedom of action. By virtue of their ordination vows all are obliged to exercise full ministry including active participation in the ordination of women. (Acts & Proceedings 1982 p.512)*

### Committee on the Place of Women in the Church

1973-1023-1-1	1958	Reference paper World Council of Churches: Report on Women in the Ministry
1973-1023-1-2	n.d. (1963?)	<u>Putting Woman in Her Place: A Study Guide on the Place of Women in the Church</u> n.d.; 16pp.
1973-1023-1-3	1955	Report to General Assembly 1955; 12pp. Printed for distribution to Presbyteries [copy extracted from records of Presbytery of West Toronto]

### Special Task Force on the Study of Liberty of Conscience in the Ordination of Women

1987-1003-1-1	1982	Report and Supportive material "Report of the Special Task Force on the Study of Liberty of Conscience in the Ordination of Women" 1982; 16pp. "Supportive material pertaining the Report of the Special Task Force on the Study of Liberty of Conscience in the Ordination of Women" 1982; 26pp.
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