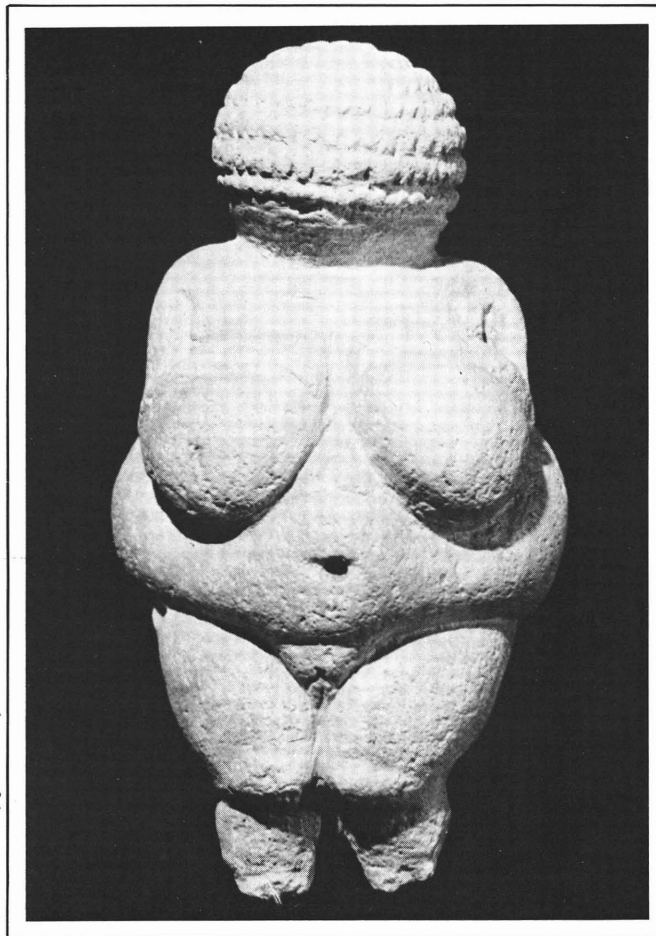


To the degree that women's groups could achieve their goals without disrupting or threatening the existing power relationships between men and women, they were generally supported by the church as a whole: "... the men of the church were only too ready to accept contributions of money and prayer from women, but could not abide their speaking in public." It was only when they began to have a sense of their own calling and mission and developed autonomous enterprises that the church became uneasy about its women's groups.

While many churchwomen have remained unaware of the political implications of their organizations, some others have been quite deliberate about their strategies to overcome gender discrimination. The current issue of inclusive language, for example, is one that Methodist women in Saskatchewan would have been familiar with in 1906: "At the Methodist General Conference of 1894, the Presidents of Ladies' Aids were admitted to Quarterly Boards, and in 1906 a motion was introduced to change the term layman to lay member, which would automatically admit women to church Courts. (It was defeated, but only by 42 votes." Perhaps those brave pioneers felt the same way their sister from British Columbia does today when she writes, "enough is enough!"

Formal organizations strengthened the political status of women, both collectively and individually, in the church. The first women to sit on boards or sessions were usually there as representatives of their group. Many congregations did not admit women to their policy-making bodies until representation of the United Church Women became mandatory in 1962. Now increasing numbers of women are serving on their own merit, not as representatives but as partners with men in the community of the church. Although women constitute the majority of its membership, however, the United Church continues to be dominated by men.

Photo: Courtesy J. Stuckey



## THE VENUS OF WILLENDORF

The Venus of Willendorf  
 Projected in colour on a vast wall  
 Commands space, attention, reverence.  
 The fat woman sits open mouthed and quite still.  
 The figure stands on legs that dwindle to a point  
 As surely as though her huge belly and breasts,  
 Her centre of gravity, keep her upright, stable.  
 Does she ever sway? Slightly? At all?  
 She is a goddess,  
 No pushing her about.  
 She is nature,  
 No arguing with her.  
 "Oh" the fat woman cries in wonder, "oh."

The fat woman goes to the goddess.  
 The goddess is small enough to hold in the palm of one hand.  
 She is a tiny image, a life-size woman, an enormous goddess.  
 "Her belly is the shape of mine,  
 My breasts resemble hers,  
 My heart goes out to her."  
 The fat woman is nearly crying.  
 She pleads with the goddess  
 But the goddess is not of flesh,  
 She partakes of massive stone  
 And she speaks no words.

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