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**Making Room for Women Project**

**Interview with Marion Carr**

**January 31, 2014**

## **Oral History Recording Summary**

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Interviewee: Marion Carr  
Date of Interview: January 31, 2014  
Transcribed by: Katherine Chambers

Interviewed by: Melanie Ihmels (MI)  
Auditor of Transcription: Marion Carr

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<b>Time Log (minutes)</b>	<b>Description of Content</b>
00:01	Beginning of Interview; introduction, early life
02:54	Current positions in the United Church
04:17	Family
04:51	Education
06:22	Volunteer work
06:48	Gender inequality
07:43	Leadership responsibilities
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14:27	Important challenges in ministry life
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34:30	Lessons for future generations
36:36	Importance of being involved in the church

- MI: Good afternoon. This is an interview for the Making Room for Women project with the United Church of Canada. I am interviewing Marion Carr at approximately 12:30 pm on January 31, [2014]. This is a general interview for the purpose of collecting oral history—there we go. 00:01
- So, welcome, Ms. Carr. Thank you for participating. My first question has to do with your early life: your family, community, participation in the church. What would you like to share about that? 00:29
- MC: My father was a dyed in the wool Presbyterian, actually. In that way, we grew up with no playing cards on Sunday, and as we got older and started playing them on our own, he never would participate, but was a member of the United Church for many years and lived in the Cariboo—was where I actually joined the church, was in Lac La Hache, many years ago—don't ask me the year.
- MI: Can I ask when you were born?
- MC: 1948. So then, we grew up with our church background, and that has always continued. My husband didn't come from a United Church background, but is now. When we lived in Terrace in 1972, we went to the United Church and the first Sunday we went—can't remember who the minister was—but was asked: number one, they asked him if he could take up the offering. He looked a little stunned but figured he could do that. And they asked if I played the organ. I said, "Not in public." And we did not go back there; we decided it was a little overwhelming at that point in time. But we remained United Church members and quite active in it over the years.
- MI: So your background as a child was United Church. And you are now a member. What are your positions within the United Church now? 02:54
- MC: I chair the Candidacy Pathway. And I serve on the Ministry Employment Personnel—MEPS, as we call it ... Ministry Employment Personnel Services.
- MI: MEPS. Are you an ordained minister?
- MC: No.
- MI: Designated lay?
- MC: No.
- MI: So do you have ... are you paid for any of your work or is this all volunteer?
- MC: No. It's volunteer.
- MI: And would you say that was your relationship with the United Church for the past ... however long you've been following it? (Laughter)

- MC: I've never been paid. I've never been an employee of the United Church. So it is voluntary, yes.
- MI: That's amazing. How about your family? Your husband ... you talked a little bit ... do you have children? 04:17
- MC: I have two daughters.
- MI: And are they involved with the church as well?
- MC: Yeah, somewhat. More in the fashion of young people today. They're both members of the United Church, but that doesn't mean you go every Sunday.
- MI: I have two teenagers. I understand. (Laughter) What about your education? 04:51
- MC: I started out ... I never finished my degree because, early on in our married life, my husband got transferred fairly regularly. We headed up to Terrace immediately after the wedding and then we came back to Vancouver for about six months—long enough for me to register again for a course, but not long enough to finish it. And then he got moved over to Victoria.
- MI: Was he a Navy?
- MC: Nope. He worked for Finning Tractor and Equipment. So, although I started out with keen interest in special ed, I never finished my degree. I did volunteer in a school as a special ed assistant for a number of years.
- MI: So you've done a lot of volunteer work over the years.
- MC: Yeah. There's some good things about a husband that didn't particularly want you to work. And I got to pick and choose.
- MI: And you could change as the years went on.
- MC: That's right.
- MI: So I've asked about working outside home for pay ... no. So what led to your decisions about volunteer involvement? How did you choose which ones you wanted to be? 06:22
- MC: If somebody asked and I was interested, I probably said yes. If I was not interested, I had no difficulty saying no.
- MI: As a volunteer, did you ever run into problems with gender inequality? 06:48
- MC: Probably not. I'd say not.

- MI: Do you remember any moments in your life that that issue became strong—that it stood out to you?
- MC: No. Not in relation to myself. But then, I'm usually fairly good at holding my own.
- MI: I'm hearing that as a theme, actually. (Laughter). Did you find it as a mother or on behalf of your daughters? Any issues with gender inequality?
- MC: No. Both of my girls are quite independent.
- MI: So what leadership responsibilities have you carried in the church over the years? 07:43
- MC: I taught Sunday school. I chaired the Pastoral Relations Committee—but before that I chaired the Worship Committee in my own congregation. And then I was conned into going to presbytery meetings [laughs] by an elderly gentleman in our congregation who was well-known in the wider church—Jerry Betts—who told me there was a program he thought I'd like to hear and that he'd buy me dinner. So I went, and he did that a couple times and when the next annual report came in, I noted that I'd been put down as the alternative.
- MI: (Laughs) That's so United Church!
- MC: Is it not? (Laughter) And at that point I didn't quite pick up on that. Anyway, so I had been a member of the presbytery for a year. I became its chair in 1989, right after 1988, so that was a fun year. And then when I was finished chairing the presbytery, I became the Pastoral Relations Convener for a number of years.
- MI: How long were you presbytery chair?
- MC: I think in those years we had a two-year term, but I could be wrong. I think it was a two-year term.
- MI: And then Pastoral ...
- MC: Relations. Seemed like forever, but I had no idea how long.
- MI: (Laughs). What was your favourite position?
- MC: I don't know. And I also did Education and Students. I don't know if I really had a favourite position. I like working with people. Least favourite would probably have been the chair.
- MI: So then after Education and Students, you moved into the Candidacy Pathway and MEPS.

- MC: Actually, I was selected as a lay rep to the General Council Executive. So I served on that for six years.
- MI: When was that?
- MC: Probably 2003, give or take. I served as rep for six years. Two three-year terms.
- MI: What was that like? 11:10
- MC: Actually, I found it a positive experience. Despite (often) the reputation of the wider church about the Church back east—about the General Council, as you hear it expressed—I found it a positive experience.
- MC: People were committed to what they were doing about staff and lay people, or staff and volunteers. Some very committed staff. And, as I've been known to remind the Conference during that time, the decisions are not made by the staff; the decisions were always made by the elected members. And for many years, BC had the most volunteers involved in national committees than any [other] conference. So I don't know that I had a favourite—least would be chairing the presbytery.
- MI: Why would that be your least?
- MC: I had to be nice.  
(Laughter)
- MI: That I also totally understand! What were the important issues, joys or challenges in your ministry life? I could break it up. Why don't we start with: what were the most important issues in your ministry life? 13:11
- MC: Oh ... well, I'd say the issues in the times. Well, I came on just after 1988, so obviously that was ... with the presbytery ... was a big issue—it was a big issue all through the church and through congregations. Some of the issues in MEPS, of course, unified payroll, seemed to be quite time consuming, if not really an issue. It's certainly an issue for some ordained folks. Attracting people to the ministry has always been an issue as to how do we do that. If I thought about that for a week I might come up with some answers.
- MI: (Laughs). What about challenges? 14:27
- MC: Challenges? Accountability in the Church ... getting beyond the “we all have to be nice.” The necessity to sometimes have to call people on their behaviour that's inappropriate. Comes with chairing a couple of hearings.

- MI: You've mentioned 1988 a couple of times ... so—the fallout from that. That's what you mean by it being challenging, is what happened after that? 15:28
- MC: Yeah, some people decided they couldn't stay within the church. Divisions in congregations. A lot of hurt people. Quite often, when people got carried away with the debate, they forgot that some of the people they were talking about were actually in their midst.
- MI: So that was a time, then, of a lot of healing work for the church.
- MC: Right.
- MI: Did you find yourself really intensely involved with some of the fallout?
- MC: Yes, as Pastoral Relations Convener in some congregations.
- MI: What about the joys? 16:49
- MC: Those have been many. There again, I have to think to be specific. Friendships, obviously. Things I've learned, people I've met. I also served on the Conference Executive two different times; a lot of friends I met there. So I'd say mostly the joys of the people. Really, what it would boil down to is the people I've encountered and worked with and met.
- MI: And would that kind of leak over into your general life as well, then?
- MC: Yeah, probably.
- MI: So if you're looking ... we talked about in ministry, what about in your life? What are the important joys and issues and challenges that you found in your own life?
- MC: I have two children, and they were both a joy and a challenge. Both now grown—can still be a joy and a challenge. Both girls. Both adults now, of course. But certainly a lot of joys and challenges there. Both quite musical and things that they performed in. The joy of watching our youngest at the Metro Theater in a pantomime again this year. So, certainly family, but also friends. There's joy in sometimes seeing things go well. There will be a joy when these candidacy process is evaluated and done and I'm finished. (Laughter). As in all tasks, you know, there's always that. There's also always a regret, though, when things are finished, because you have met and worked with people. Particularly if it's gone fairly well, you know, you're glad it's done, but ...
- MI: So, one of the things I hear as sort of an overall theme is people, and how important people have been to your life, not just in your Christian walk but in your regular life as well.
- MC: Yes, I'd say so.

MI: Can you expand on that a little bit?

MC: Probably not. But if there are friends and family, you know, they can make it worthwhile. Otherwise it's just a task. And I lose interest in things that are just a task very quickly.

MI: For you a lot of it is about a relationship.

MC: Yes.

MI: And would you say the same thing with God?

MC: Rephrase that.

MI: Would you say one of the most important parts of your Christian walk is your relationship with God?

MC: A relationship with God, and with God through people.

MI: Is there any particular work or project that you are really proud of?

MC: I wouldn't say there is one that I'm particularly proud of. I've tried to do them all in a half-decent fashion. Nobody's told me otherwise, but that could be just because they didn't want to have to do it themselves. So, no, I can't think of anything.

MI: In your adult years, what have you been most passionate about?

21:15

MC: Within my church life? Certainly I was passionate around 1988, having grown up in a home where it wasn't an issue. I remember my oldest daughter asking her grandmother, who must have been 80+ at that time, because it was in all the papers, of course, "So, what do you think of this issue, Gram?" And Mummy said, "I don't think it should be an issue." So there certainly was some strong feelings that some of this nastiness shouldn't be.

MI: What about the issue of women being ordained in the church? Was that something that was ever a concern in your family?

MC: Not that I recall. But then my mother was a school principal before many women were, so that would not have been an issue at all.

MI: Can you think of a defining moment in your life that made you choose to act the way you do or make choices vocationally the way you did? Is there one point that was a turning point or an "Aha" moment?

22:46

MC: I don't really think so.



MI: Have you noticed any effects of your class or your race or your sexuality and if there have been any effects on your life because of those things? 23:41

MC: Well, if by class you mean being part of the privileged, then yes. Certainly never been hungry. We have the ability to travel; we have the ability to do a lot of things that many people don't. But with that also comes responsibility to do something decent with all that.

MI: Is that some of your motivation for volunteering?

MC: I don't know whether when I first volunteered to be a Sunday school teacher if that was motivated or if they needed one and I had two kids.

MI: You have kids: you can teach.

MC: To be absolutely honest, whether, at that point in time I'd have said I was motivated by ... or whether it just kind of went on from there, and then yes, I do believe that the church can do a lot of good in the world and make an impact and maybe even make the odd change and that's where I'd like to put my energy—in positive things ...

MI: Leisure time ... what do you do for leisure? 25:33

MC: We like to travel.

MI: Where have you gone?

MC: We've been to England and Scotland. That was my husband's dream when he first retired so we left about a week later with some friends and spent a hundred and one days travelling. Well, it had to be a hundred and one days because the friends we were travelling with had a wedding—they were from England—and my husband wanted to see the Edinburgh Tattoo and in order to make it from one place to the other and back to the airport, we were there for a hundred and one days. So we do like to travel. We've been to Thailand; across Canada; New Zealand, to visit a Presbyterian minister friend there.

MI: Is it true there's lots of sheep?

MC: There were lots of sheep. There were lots of sheep.

MI: Have you been throughout the United States, too?

MC: Very little, actually. Strangely. But down the West Coast.

MI: So travelling is one thing.

MC: Yes. We square dance.

MI: Is that fun?

MC: It is, actually, and it's a good way to meet people. We got into square dancing when we moved to Terrace in 1969, I guess, 'cause one of the fellows up there said to my husband: "There's two things to do up here: you spend your time in the bar or you come square dancing with me." And Dave said, "I'm not sure my wife's really into the bar scene, so we'll try it." And it worked well, 'cause when we got transferred to Victoria it was a good way to meet people, and when we came back here it was part of our lives.

MI: So, since 1969, that's quite a long time. Anything else?

MC: No. Well, my husband's a barber shopper, so I support that. I like to read. I don't like to be interrupted if I'm doing that. But I'm not into crafts and stuff. I read. Play the piano, but not particularly well.

MI: Something you enjoy.

MC: It's for my own amusement only.

MI: So what's important to you about your life right now?

28:28

MC: Right now? Finish the Candidacy Pathway. I don't know specifically right now over other times. Keep in touch with my brother and sister, neither of whom live here and are both older than I am. The kids.

MI: So the next couple of questions are a little bit bigger. If you're thinking about the United Church and you're heavily involved with some of the big changes that are happening, what direction do you hope the church will go in the future?

26:16

MC: I hope it will continue to be inclusive, welcoming—open to the communities where they are. I do like the fact that we are a national church. I think in being a national church, it does give us a wider voice if there are things we don't consider right—we have some voice, a fair bit of voice, actually, in the Residential Schools. In admitting that that was wrong and trying to bring around some ... for people that had experienced Residential Schools—healing, financial, get the government to kind of get moving, join with some other denominations. Which has been a big one that is dear to my heart—my sister-in-law is Native. So that's a ... priority I hope we continue to be involved and be proactive.

MI: Knowing that the Church is under a set of changes, what changes do you see needing to happen, or that are currently happening?

31:31

MC: Well, when the Comprehensive Review is finished, I have a hunch there will definitely be changes. With less money you can do less. I can see us becoming more isolated, like, congregations not quite as involved in the wider

church. In some areas it's hard to get people to realize they're not just one congregation here in the middle of wherever, and I think that that connection is important. We bring a slightly different viewpoint than a lot of other denominations.

MI: Is that also important, back into the national discussion?

MC: I think certainly it keeps us connected as a church and gives us a little more voice than just individual congregations or even conferences.

MI: Now, an issue that is obviously dear to your heart is volunteering. And I heard someone mention that there is a crisis of volunteering within the United Church. What would you ... what do you think about that comment? 33:16

MC: I have a hunch that that's probably true, because members of the United Church are getting older, and generally couples both work, which when we were younger was not necessarily so ... and there's less people, so obviously there's less people that will do some volunteer work, that have the time and the flexibility.

MI: So what do you think that will mean for the church in the future?

MC: Good question, seeing as we can't really afford more staff and ... basically, probably that things will have to be done differently. Just what that might look like? We might get an inkling of that when we read the Comprehensive Review.

MI: So, looking over the last 80 years or so, what are some of the lessons you think we could take forward into future generations? 34:30

MC: Maybe the importance of having a belief system. Doesn't necessarily have to be mine ... and the importance of being connected ... other than just by text. (Laughter) And that you can actually talk to people, that there's still work to be done and intercultural relations, that that's still a biggy in the church, that people become afraid of losing what they have. So I think that's a big one.

MI: I'm just wondering if there's anything I missed that you would like to speak about. If there's anything you'd like to add.

MC: Certainly involvement in the church has given meaning to my life. We've been a member of the church wherever we've been, except for Terrace. A member at Belmont Avenue in Victoria for four years when we lived there. 36:36

MI: Why is being a member of the United Church so important to you?

MC: The United Church specifically?

MI: The United Church or being Christian.

MC: I think it gives meaning to life. And I do believe we are called to something. Specifically what, I'm not entirely sure. I'm not a literalist. I can't imagine myself comfortable in any other denomination. I'm not that good at being told exactly what I should believe or should not believe, so I probably wouldn't fit in. Not only would I not be comfortable but they'd be uncomfortable having me! For me it gives meaning to life. I'm thankful for our family—all of us look at things differently, that there's a connectedness there.

MI: This is just a question that popped into my head as you were talking: a couple of the people I've interviewed, one of the first things they say is: "Why is my name on the list? Why am I important to interview?" So why do you think your name is on the list?

MC: I've not a clue. (Laughter) I guess long history in the church as a lay person is probably about the only thing I can think of.

MI: Well you've been witness to a lot of different things and perhaps that's one of the reasons. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

MC: I can't think of anything at the moment.

MI: Okay. Well, those are all the questions that I have. It is 40 minutes and that makes in roughly about quarter after one, I think. I'm ending the interview with Marion Carr at forty minutes. Thank you very much for participating.