

by Sheri Hostetler

## Holy Spirit visits sewing circle, women say

Honey Creek, Ohio (MP)—A group of women from a Mennonite church here believe they have been visited by the Holy Spirit. The women, all members of the Maple Creek Mennonite Church, were gathered for their monthly sewing circle last July. They were having their usual morning devotions when “the presence of the Spirit fell upon the group,” said Erma Detweiler, one of the women in attendance.

When asked if the descent of the Spirit sounded like the rushing of a mighty wind, Detweiler replied, “Not really. It was more like that swishing noise your legs make when you’re walking in pantyhose.” This was the women’s first clue that a different sort of Spirit had been visited upon them.

The second clue came when, immediately after the descent of the Spirit, each of the women not only found her own voice but began speaking in it. It was then that the Spirit revealed itself to the group as a feminine manifestation of the divine, according to Detweiler.

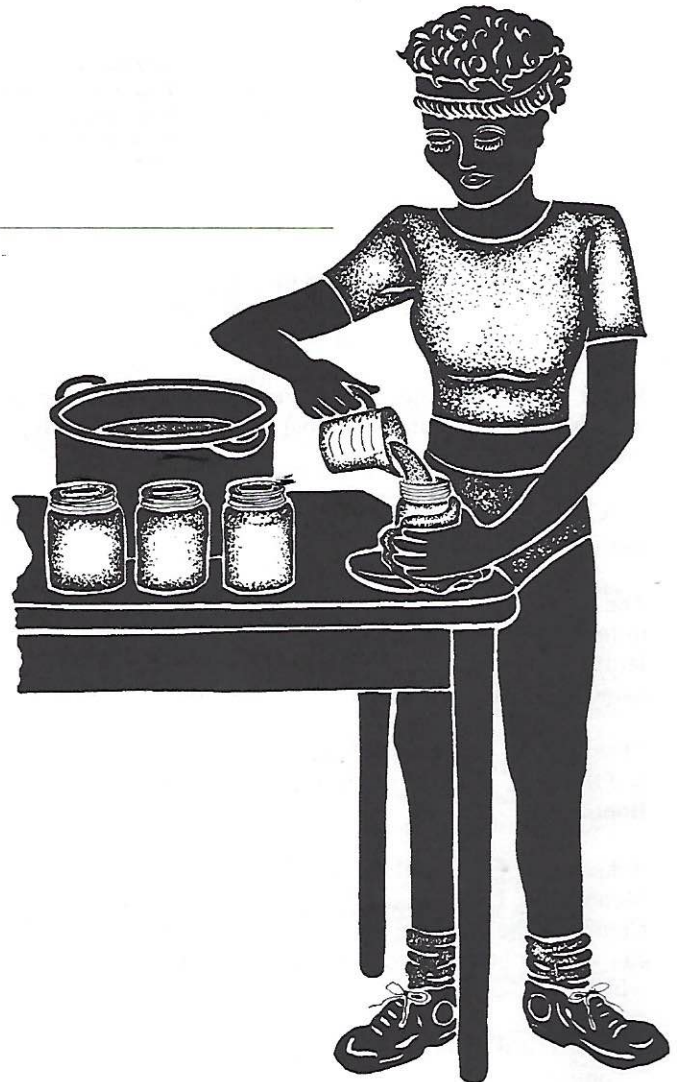
Initially, the women assumed they should refer to the Spirit as “Sophia,” the feminine personification of Wisdom found in Old Testament scriptures. “The irony is that some of us had been as angry as anybody about the Re-imagining Conference,” Detweiler said. “A couple of us even wrote letters to the *Gospel Herald*.”

Sophia, however, disclosed her preference to be called Martha. This led to some confusion among the women.

“We said to Her, ‘Don’t you mean Mary?’ She said that’s what Catholics call her, but that she thought we could identify more with Martha,” said Lovina Mast, also in attendance at the unusual morning devotions.

The women continued to have daily visitations by Martha for almost a week. They report that in appearance, Martha did not at all resemble a first century Palestinian woman.

“In fact, she looked a lot like (well-known Mennonite writer) Elaine Rich,” said Mast.



The women said that during most of her appearances, Martha spoke mysteries too profound for words. One time, however she did reveal a foolproof recipe for shoofly pie.

In the aftermath of this “Second Pentecost,” the women are struggling to discern their next step. Some have reportedly set up camp in the room where the visitation occurred, hoping that Martha will reappear and reveal more recipes so that they can publish a new *Mennonite Community Cookbook*.

Others have become “more aware of their bodies” and have enrolled in a class through the local college’s Women’s Studies Department entitled, “Reclaiming our Body-Selves through Creative Canning Techniques.”

“We believe that through creative canning, women can begin to re-weave the fabric of life that has been rent through millennia of patriarchal oppression,” said Fern Miller. “We



**"Pastor Ward Miller, husband of Fern, said he doesn't know what his wife is talking about but admits he feels "oddly nurtured" by her canned corn."**

are literally birthing a new way of being in the world by reclaiming the girl-child within through canning techniques that tap into the deep well of women's ways of knowing."

Pastor Ward Miller, husband of Fern, said he doesn't know what his wife is talking about but admits he feels "oddly nurtured" by her canned corn.

"It's her running around in lavender Danskin leotards I just can't understand," he said.

The most controversial group has split off from the church to form their own feminist separatist community on some farmland in northwest Ohio. The group has taken on the name of Women's Marthian Separatist Colony, or WMSC.

"The WMSC was looking for a new identity for the '90s, and this is it," said Lillith (formerly known as Lily Bontrager).

Asked if the group still considered themselves to be Mennonites, Lillith said, "We have joined our sisters in the Church of the Brethren in resisting patriarchal naming. How can we ever be liberated if we call ourselves by a name in which 'men' come first?"

The separatist faction briefly considered calling themselves "Womennonites" before rejecting that since it, too, contained the offending word. The name "Womynnonites" is currently undergoing a process of consensus, according to Lillith.

When asked for comment about this "Second Pentecost," prominent church officials wept openly, saying that between homosexuality and the merger, they were just too overwhelmed to deal with the second coming of the Holy Spirit.

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