

Women and Ministry

This final section of *The Chronicle* includes three articles on **unexpected disruptions** that women of the past had to face in connection with their husbands' entering the full-time ministry. In the past five years, 37.5% of those ordained elders in the Susquehanna Conference have been women – but there was time when that figure was 0.0%. In those days, just about the only ways a female could fulfill a perceived calling to Christian service was as a missionary, a deaconess or the wife of a pastor. And the wife of a pastor, more than the wife of a man in almost any other occupation, had to share her husband's vision for that calling. The women behind the successful pastors of previous generations form a largely overlooked and underappreciated segment of church history.

Those women who gave themselves to supporting the call of their spouses were particularly vulnerable to three types of **unexpected disruptions** that could easily cause them to question their own faith or the path they had chosen: the death of a spouse, divorce, or the restrictions placed on the development of their own selves. The three articles in this section examine these three scenarios.

Mrs. Esther (Weidner) Reber married a young pastor of the most promising sort, but his death left her as a young widow with one small child and another on the way. Her strong faith helped her to continue in the role she had envisioned when she first entered parsonage life.

Mrs. Grace (Snyder) Martin was raised in a parsonage, met her future husband at a church college, and entered expectantly with him into the mission field. When their post-missionary life of raising a family and ministering together to children and youth within public education was disrupted by divorce, Mrs. Martin was able to continue to live out her calling in Christian love and faithfulness.

The third article on “Working Wives” was written by ordained elder Dr. John Piper, retired history professor and academic dean at Lycoming College, who currently serves as chairman of the Conference Commission on Archives and History. His research has uncovered documentation of the subtle ways in which the male-dominated conferences of the past were so focused on the image and success of their male pastors that they supported policies and practices that even to this day continue to hinder former parsonage wives from receiving just recompense and respect for their sacrifices.

May these three stories of past **unexpected disruptions** help us all to more fully appreciate those who labor behind the scenes in various contexts, to be quicker to recognize opportunities to aid our fellow-travelers on the highway of life, and to better prepare ourselves for whatever lies around the bend in the road.