



**IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME: A Guide for Study and Action**  
**For Such a Time as This**  
***by Shirley St. John***

The early 21<sup>st</sup> Century finds women in new roles and professions and facing changing demands. We are faced with opportunities and dilemmas different from those which confronted our Disciples sisters in earlier times. Their stories of passion and devotion are splendidly rehearsed in In the Fullness of Time: A History of Women in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). This is a moving and inspiring story by Fran Craddock, Martha Faw and Nancy Heimer who lived much of this account.

If you find reading books a daunting activity, relate to the book as a newspaper. Choose the parts that 'reach out and grab you'. The important thing is to hear our sisters' call to BE THE CHURCH in our own time and place. When their challenges seemed impossible, they listened more attentively to the Spirit. Their difficulties and challenges were neither less nor more demanding than ours. As we hear their stories, how do we get excited enough to let love lead *us* into action?

Here is one possibility.

**INITIATE, PUBLICIZE AND RECRUIT.**

- ≈ Choose your target audience. Many possible groupings come to mind: working women, young mothers, older women available during the day.
- ≈ Decide on a time of day that is possible for the group you choose and find 3 weeks when that time is not in conflict with major church or community events.
- ≈ Announce the study/action group and recruit individuals whom you feel would profit from this kind of experience. (Write personal notes, make phone calls, talk to folks at church.)
- ≈ Make the book, In the Fullness of Time available. Be sure anyone who has an interest in the group has a copy.

Clearly, this design leaves room for much creativity on the part of the group. That's the intent. If the women only glimpse the wonder of their history, that would be worthwhile. If they are moved to action, that would be great!

**SESSION ONE**

Introduce yourselves and tell how you came to be a member of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

DO NOT ASK who has read the book. Be sure everyone has access to a book, and then suggest that we all browse through the book for a few minutes and find one of the stories about Disciples women that catches our attention. Take 5-10 minutes to read. Then, offer this context.

“These stories about Disciples women who saw their mission and did it are pearls for us to treasure. Let’s share 3 or 4 of these stories with the group. Keep them brief enough to be interesting, but descriptive enough to encourage us.”

Let’s string these stories of women’s patience, persistence, vision and courage into a necklace of discipleship which we have been given as our inheritance.

(List these stories for future use.)



How could we share this beautiful treasure with others? Example: Make a necklace of colored paper circles with a title for each story you tell in the group. Share the necklace of love and concern with another group, such as a Sunday School class or another women’s group.

## **SESSION 2**

Choose one of the stories from the last week.

Imagine each of the following scenes.

- ≈ The woman sees the issue that needs to be dealt with.
- ≈ She discerns what needs to happen. Does she gather a group? How does she do this? If the book is not clear about this, what do you imagine happened?
- ≈ How does she organize for action?
- ≈ What were the obstacles? What kept her going?

Divide into smaller groups and see if you can dance this experience. Or, think about a puppet show that could share the story with children. Think about other art forms that can communicate beyond words. Share these with the whole group next week as a review. Try to capture the feelings of these experiences of women from our past.

## **SESSION 3**

Review last week by having the smaller groups show the others the art form they created last week. Our history as Disciples women is clearly an essential part of the whole church, both past and future.

- ≈ In our congregation, what needs do we see?
- ≈ What possibilities are waiting to be actualized?
- ≈ In order for this goal to be achieved, what needs to happen - spiritually, socially and economically?
- ≈ What could be our part in this?
- ≈ How would we set about enacting this vision?

How does this conversation make you feel?

**And now the real question, what shall we do?**