

Editorial

How can an organization such as the Women's Institute assess its progress? Periodically, businesses and often individuals have to take stock to consider their net value and to lay plans for the future. Since the Women's Institutes are now celebrating a 75th Anniversary this may be a point in their history when a close examination of the organization should take place, some old concepts discarded and other guidelines strengthened and instituted. What is the quality of the progress that has been made?

One aspect of progress cannot be overlooked and that is the growth in numbers. The organization that started as a single thirty five member branch in Stoney Creek in 1897 is now a society of over sixty thousand members in Canada and many thousands in organizations known as Women's Institutes all over the world. This growth seems indicative that membership in this remarkable organization is something of value.

For an organization an anniversary should be a time of looking forward as well as looking back and not too much looking back either. Looking back can produce complacency and smug self satisfaction. This must not be or the Women's Institutes established and fostered by doughty, dauntless women will fade away.

We are living in a different world from that of 1897. The rural emphasis of the organization is giving away to a rural urban aspect with little difference between rural and urban members. There is not the need for Women's Institutes to provide a social outlet for women although the social time provides a friendly, informal atmosphere bringing women more closely together and letting them get to know each other better, and this is important.

All program planners for Women's Institute meetings should often examine the still excellent objectives of the organization as they appear in the Handbook. They should assess their programs in terms of these objectives and in terms of our modern problems and the community and world environment. The dissemination of knowledge, discussions and the development of skills and abilities must be our aim. The Women's Institute does not ask for women's rights; it aims at developing women to be capable of assuming their rights and fulfilling their roles.

The Women's Institute has within it the possibility of becoming one of the most powerful organizations in the world. It has no commitments to any other organization or institution. It has no religious, racial or political barriers, thus opening up the possibility of communications with women of every race, every religion, every political affiliation. Through its connections with A.C.W.W. and the United Nations it shows concern for women who have from the beginning of civilization lagged behind because of social, geographical and traditional barriers.

The object of the Women's Institutes is not to make large amounts of money. True we have to make money since we undertake projects, some of them costly. These we can support only by contributing money, but any branch that finds making money its main activity will be defeating its purpose.

The Women's Institute has become a stabilizing force in the community. In this day of large school areas, amalgamation of churches and changing municipal lines, much local autonomy is lost. The Women's Institute remains a focal point drawing together the sections of what is left of the local community and yet projecting its thinking into provincial, national and international affairs.

We who are now members have inherited a great organization; it can be a much greater organization, and that is in our hands. But thinking in terms of the humble beginning and then considering the world wide organization with its many completed and continuing projects, its overall efforts to institute modern thinking, it is obvious that tremendous progress has been made.

Our mothers and grandmothers paved the way for all of this. It wasn't easy. It is our organization now and we should again recall the words of the German poet Goethe, "That which thy fathers have bequeathed to thee, earn it anew if thou wouldst possess it."

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