

Editorial

What are the responsibilities of members of the Women's Institute? We are told of the responsibilities of the president, the secretary treasurer, the public relations officer and the conveners; but that the member with no special position has responsibilities is not always mentioned.

On page 78 of the Handbook under the heading "Good Form For Members" there are listed seven points which are guidelines for the member to consider. How many of the branch members know that these are in the Handbook? How many times are they read aloud at a branch meeting? Since these seven points are listed in the Handbook they will not be mentioned in this Editorial.

We are often reminded that with privileges, and let us add benefits, there are responsibilities. Let us consider the benefits.

First of all membership in the Women's Institute can provide a mind expanding experience. One way this can happen is that in the organization there can be opportunities to meet other women of the community who may have common interests but are not of the same religious faith political party or even racial background. Then if members will take advantage of attending District Annual Meetings, Conventions, National and International Conferences, they will find themselves in the company of women whose homes are outside their own community and possibly province and country. At these meetings members can hear good speakers on subjects that can open up new avenues of thought and enjoy good entertainment of a different type than is available in the home community. But to enjoy these benefits the woman herself must take the first step beyond her own doorstep.

Membership in this organization can help a woman to discover and develop natural talents. A woman may have an inclination for secretarial work, taking the office of secretary treasurer can provide her with an opportunity to do this kind of work and perhaps develop a latent talent. Or a woman may have a liking for the type of work done by a president; she may like presiding at meetings and speaking in public. The office of president can give her a chance to get experience, overcome nervousness and develop a feeling of accomplishment and competence. It could be that that woman would go on to offices beyond the branch in the organization or in other organizations. All other offices provide chances for self development. A talent for leadership has shown up in many women through involvement with 4H Homemaking Clubs.

The Women's Institutes have become famous for their contributions to the communities in which they are situated. For the woman seriously concerned about community affairs here is a chance to get involved, and involved furthermore with a group of interested women to share her concern. The community need not be just the home circle. It can go beyond to the county, provincial, national and international community.

So these are some of the benefits; what are the responsibilities? Any person who tells a prospective member that on becoming a member there is nothing to do is doing that prospective member a disservice. Who would really want to join an organization that did nothing? There are many things to do. A member is expected to attend the meetings as regularly as possible, to be there on time and to answer the Roll Call with the required response. The member who merely says "Present" is shirking a very simple duty that is part of that day's program. If the roll call is worthwhile it can contribute to information and can be inspirational.

When topics are being discussed and brought to vote the member is supposed to express her considered opinion by voting. A member should, if at all possible, serve on committees if asked. Committees arrange and carry out a great amount of the effective work of the Institute and each member is expected to do her share.

A member has an obligation to take office, again, if at all possible. The work of the Institute lies in the hands of the members and the time comes for almost every member to take her turn at being responsible for the conduct of the organization. Being an officer brings privileges but these privileges come when the woman assumes her responsibility for the smooth running of the Institute affairs be it at Branch, District, Area or Provincial levels.

We often hear older women say "We are all older women and cannot do very much for our Branch." Getting older is a fact of life, we cannot avoid or postpone it. But aging bodies do not necessarily mean aging minds and have you ever noticed that the older person who keeps busy is often a charming person with whom to associate? It would seem that these older women having enjoyed their Institute associations have an obligation to keep their Branch alive in that community for the benefit of younger women. Presumably older women have more spare time than young women, more time then to search out young women to become members, more time to arrange good interesting programs to attract young members, more time to sponsor Workshops and Short Courses to which they can invite women in the community, more time to find girls for 4H Clubs and leaders and even to act as leaders. They could even provide a baby sitting service or a mending service so that young women can leave their homes to go to meetings.

The Women's Institute is not an organization to provide its members with constant entertainment. It is an organization to involve you, to stimulate you, to activate you to provide you with opportunities for service. The friendships developed and the social aspects are an added bonus. But members must come into it with their minds open to accept the responsibilities as well as enjoy the benefits.

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