

Do more lobbying!

By Carol Stewart-Kirkby

"Women are the all time pros at lobbying," according to Sister Thomas More Bertels, a teacher and farming advocate from Wisconsin. Speaking to women at the New Frontiers for Farm Women '87 seminar, offered by Women for the Support of Agriculture (southwestern Ontario), in March, Sister Bertels went on to encourage all organizations, particularly farm groups to do more lobbying.

"While change is inevitable, it is occurring so fast and so diversely, we don't know how to cope with it," Sister Bertels said. Instead, we often blame the organizations we belong to and the organizations blame the members. "At the moment we seem to be satisfied with the routine repairs, but the bottom line is the machinery is not here to handle crisis. Everything is organized, but we need to restructure the organization to handle the problems," Sister Bertels explained. Lobbying is one way of forcing the restructure.

Organizations, all of them, are not as effective as they should be. "I'm going to generalize, but I think you'll get my point. Women's groups collect old clothes and eat. Men's groups wear old clothes and drink," Sister Bertels said.

She encouraged the women to use the machinery within their organizations to get power. She defined power as the ability to get things done and get people to help you get things done. "I'm not asking you to be Hitler. I'm asking you to be involved in the production of intendant effects," Sister Bertels explained.

Although one would think involvement in agriculture would unify farmers and farm organizations, often that is not the case. "There are lots of differences between farmers. I would even say there is a class structure. A lot depends upon the farmer's self-image. One farmer considers himself a businessman who does his own labor, while another sees himself as a laborer who is self-employed. That different image makes it hard to get a consensus," Sister Bertels said.

She suggested every farmer is an entrepreneur who sees a need, believes they can fulfil that need, and pulls together resources to meet that need for a financial return. And entrepreneurs form professional groups. Within those groups, she suggested members strive to find the middle position since it is the opposite of extremes and more realistic.

Finally, Sister Bertels said the silent majority in our organizations is to blame for problems. "All members are responsible for the action of the organization."

Dr. Freeman McEwen, Dean of Ontario Agriculture College, University of Guelph and chairman of the Ontario Institute of Agrologists' Directions for Sustainable Agriculture task force, gave an overview of the task force report at the seminar.

A report on the WSA Childcare Study was given and a panel discussion on childcare presented some interesting facts. And, Sylvia Gold, president of the Canadian Advisory Council for the Status of Women gave a report.



Sister Thomas More Bertels



Sylvia Gold



A panel presentation on childcare was one part of the New Frontiers for Farm Women program. Pictured above (from left to right) are Brenda Horn of Community Home Child Care in London; Jennifer Battersea of Lambton Rural Child Care; Jean Naus of Real Women of Canada; and panel moderator Karen McLagan.