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The archives of First Christian Church, Lincoln should make room for the record of a remarkable woman who was once a member of the church and of its staff. Some time in 1925 or 1926 Ann McGrew began working as a secretary in the office of the church. I was then the assistant pastor to Ray E. Hunt with responsibility for students and for raising money for a new church. Ann helped with records and phone calls and when opportunity offered she assisted Lara Aspinwall, religious education director. She and Lara became fast friends and this friendship later resulted in Ann completing her college education and enrolling in Auburn Theological Seminary. There she met and married John Bennett, a young professor who later became a professor in Union Theological Seminary, New York, and its President. When he retired several years ago he and Ann taught for awhile in the Pacific School of Religion at Berkeley and then moved to Pilgrim Place, a retirement colony for former missionaries, ministers and other servants of the church. Here I, a former editor of The Christian Century, and my wife, joined them a decade ago.

As our acquaintance was renewed, I began to realize, as I had not earlier, what a distinguished career had carved out for herself. While her husband John was teaching and writing a score of books, Ann raised her family of three children, became a good influence in New York City politics, fought valiantly against the Vietnam war by going there, was an activist in Riverside Church and became a leading feminist against abuses in the religious world. Finally her health failed, but before she died on October 19, 1986 Union Theological Seminary gave her and John Bennett each the seminary's Medal of Honor. President Shriver and his wife crossed the continent to bestow this rare accolade, never before given to a husband and wife for distinguished service in their separate ministries.

Enclosed herewith is a statement read at her funeral. Its author is John Bennett but it was read that, a large audience in the United Church of Christ in Claremont by by a minister of that denomination to which the Bennetts belonged. It should be an inspiration to the ministers and members of First Christian Church, where Ann McGrew Bennett received her calling and her start in Christian Service.

Sincerely yours,

Harold E. Fey

Please pardon my typing! I want to get this to a few friends as soon as possible.

The Many Sides of the Life of Anne McGrew Bennett

by John C. Bennett

I am sorry not to present this account of Anne myself but, knowing my vulnerability, I doubt if I could complete it. I am very grateful to Oliver Powell for reading it for me.

I begin by expressing my deep gratitude to God for the fifty-five years of our wonderful partnership. Anne and I were joined by mutual love, mutual support, and common commitments. The two years of her illness were by no means lost years for together with sadness, frustration, and pain there were continual blessings. We were both surrounded by thoughtful love in Pilgrim Place and Anne during most of those many months was very much herself in mind and spirit and relationships. *So many write to me that during her sickness she has been an inspiration to other*

Especially in both Berkeley and Claremont people have thought of Anne as a strong public person devoted, as she was, to the cause of peace and to the liberation of women. But during most of her life she lived day by day for her family, as wife, mother, and homemaker though she always related her family to larger social goals. She gave of herself unsparingly to others with thoughtfulness in both big things and in meaningful details. As long as there were children living at home they were her chief concern and this was the case until she was nearly fifty.

When one of her brothers died leaving a widow who needed to work and four sons, the youngest of whom was a few weeks old, we welcomed him into our home as a member of our family and he lived with us for five years. Anne was very careful to keep her nephew in touch with his own family and prepared him to return when the time came to his mother and brothers. This was as natural a role for Anne as was in later life the crossing of the Pacific ocean four times in one year, involving one of her visits to Vietnam and her attendance at a meeting of an inter-religious conference in Kyoto on world peace which she had helped to ^{plan.} prepare.

Anne was a very strong person. Some of her strength came from her early years as a member of a pioneering family that farmed a section of land in the sand hills of western Nebraska. She lived in a sod house which, as she remembers, was comfortable in winter and in summer. Her family far from ^{any} ~~any~~ community lived a life that was self-sufficient beyond our imagining.

It was a very interesting journey from that sod house to Knox Hall at Union Seminary which was a few feet from Broadway. Her family when ^{she} ~~was~~ was five moved to North Platte and later to Lincoln in large part for their children's education. When I first ^{knew} ~~met~~ her she had graduated from Nebraska University and was studying at Auburn Theological Seminary. My impression is that the ^{long and varied} ~~journey~~ did not fundamentally change her. She was always strong and had great dignity and she was always a pioneer. She took on no pretensions as she gained recognition. She always preferred a simple style of living. While she was very generous with money when others were involved, her family or the causes for which she cared, ~~but~~ it was difficult to persuade her to spend money on herself. When she received the Medal from Union Seminary last January the seminary addressed her in its citation in these words: "you have always been in the forefront of those Christians of your generation ^{who} ~~with~~ salted American society with prophetic passion for public truth and justice. In all the complexities of the politics of your time, you never lost your savor, nor that directness of truth-telling with which your prairie upbringing endowed you."

Also, I should say that in New York she had many local interests. She was for a time chair of the Youth Committee of the Riverside Church, ~~and was sometimes a critic of policies of the church long before the days of Bill Clinton~~. She gave a great deal of attention to organizing an ecumenical community including Catholics and Protestants in the area of Morningside Heights. As a member of a board of the Borough President of Manhattan ~~she~~ worked hard to keep Columbia from being allowed to use its nuclear reactor because it was so close to a large population and to this day Columbia has never used it.

I first met Anne at Auburn Theological Seminary ~~in upstate~~ in upstate New York when she was in my class. I soon discovered that she was a brilliant student and admired her gifts as a writer when she wrote papers for my course, gifts of which she made very good use in later years. After a few days in class she was the only woman who came up to me and protested because I had done something unfair to the women in the class. My room was in the men's dormitory and I had invited the class to come

one evening to my room to discuss theology. It was a time when it was unthinkable ~~for~~ for women to enter a men's dormitory. I doubt if she had heard about feminism but her response to what I had done involved two roots of her later feminism. One was a sense of fairness and the other was a sense of reality. I had actually treated women in that context as though they did not exist, a common practice in the patriarchal world. She was very much aware of ^{her own reality, &} the reality of women, of their intellectual and spiritual gifts, of the need for equality in the world of women and men. Clare Fischer and Mary Hunt will speak about Anne's feminism. There is one thing said so very often about her: she was a pioneer. President Donald Shriver ^{of Union Seminary} in a beautiful letter to Anne when he first heard of her illness said this: "How many, many people remark to me: 'you know, Anne Bennett is a woman ahead of her time!' She helped Union and the whole church ^{to} see how far we had to go ^{to} bring women ~~women~~ truly and fully into the human community". One aspect of her feminism differentiated her from many others who share her goals for women. She worked chiefly in the ecumenical church. She always believed that in spite of the pervasiveness of patriarchalism in the Bible, in traditional theology, and in church history there are neglected resources for women's liberation in the largely hidden history of women in Bible and Church.

As the president's wife at Union she did all that she could to make our home a warm center for both faculty and students. I remember occasions such as Thanksgivings when she prepared a dinner ^{in our apartment} for seventy-five students. She made desserts without number ^{for} of many occasions. She had help but one ^{of Anne's difficulties} ~~trouble with Anne~~ was that she was much quicker than those who helped her. Letters that I receive remind me of many occasions of her hospitality which people still remember.

Anne is now best known for her contribution to the woman movement but for several years she gave great attention to problems of international peace, especially during the time of the Vietnam war. She visited both Saigon and Hanoi. She went to Saigon as the only woman on an interfaith team which included Father Robert Drinan, Bishop Armstrong, Rabbi Seymour Segal, Congressman Conyers and several others. They went to investigate the conditions of religious freedom and civil liberties in

South Vietnam. Anne gave great attention to the miserable conditions in which *many* children lived in the prisons she was allowed to inspect. The team's report was a grim picture of the treatment of its people by the government which our government supported. Anne went to Hanoi as a courier to bring back and forth letters between American prisoners of war and their families, a procedure to which our government objected. Thousands of letters were exchanged by Anne and her colleagues. Her visit to North Vietnam *horrified* her because of the many civilian communities and institutions destroyed by American bombs. Witness to this destruction was part of her message when she came home.

One episode in her struggle against American policy in Vietnam reveals Anne's way of ~~working~~ *doing*. With a large group she visited a draft board in New York to ask questions of the board. The board refused to see them and so they sat in or near its headquarters until they were arrested. One of my favorite pictures of Anne which was taken by Union students, who followed her, showed her somewhat perplexed surrounded by many tall helmeted policemen. Incidentally one of the policeman asked for a copy of the picture. After going through the formalities of arrest the group was released in a few hours. In an interview at the time she said that she was engaged in "civil obedience" as citizens had a right to have access to draft boards. The New York Times quoted her as saying that she was engaged in "civil disobedience". She went down to the offices of the Times and found someone whom she could persuade to ~~public~~ *fulfill* a correction, which was done, changing the words "civil disobedience" to "civil obedience". The strength of her conviction about this distinction, the precision of her thinking, and her going ~~out~~ *out* of her way to obtain the correction were very characteristic of her. Two months later a judge threw out the case against her group, agreeing with her view of their right to have access to draft boards.

I have been ~~very~~ *very* much moved by the tributes that have come to her since the beginning of her illness. A young woman for whom she had preached an ordination *sermon* wrote: "while you always rejoiced in all of us young women going into the ministry and grappling with patriarchy, you have been an incredible teacher, pioneer, *and* guide to us all." A younger contemporary who is retired wrote to her: "you have been a role ~~model~~ *model* for me since I first heard of you, your work and your spirit". I was

interested and surprised when the wife of a professor at Union who is herself a professor in another school wrote to me: "Anne's outspoken ways and activism were a model for me at a crucial point when I was struggling to become myself. It was wonderful to have ~~you~~ her example and I am grateful for her courage and strength". About two months before her death Avery Post, President of the United Church of Christ, whom we both had long admired, wrote to her: "Every time I read something that you have written from a feminist perspective, I feel that among all the women of our time who are making tremendous contributions to Christian theology and to the church, you are most courageous, closer to Scripture, closest to the existential feminist reality that all of us are seeking to understand and describe in depth".

I conclude with another sentence from the citation by Union Seminary:

"we honor you especially for your service to the church and the world in those decades of your life when you lifted ^{up} ~~up~~ the hearts of women, like yourself, who knew that the time of their liberation was at hand."