

## **Living by Faith: Family Life and Ministry in the Diary of a Pentecostal Woman Preacher, 1940-1960**

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While Agnes McAlister and her husband Harvey worked as itinerant preachers after their marriage in 1936 and then co-pastored four different churches in rural and small-town Alberta and British Columbia from 1941 to 1959, she kept a diary. As Pentecostals, the McAlisters often lived “by faith,” meaning that when their income from church work and other part-time employment was inadequate to cover the cost of raising their young family, they looked to God and their neighbours for help to make ends meet. The McAlister diary is full of references to the ways in which Agnes McAlister’s work in ministry intersected with her family life. Beyond economic issues, because she partnered with her husband in the work of the ministry, Agnes McAlister was often too busy with her preaching and church meetings to fulfill the role of homemaker and hostess singlehandedly. On many occasions her diary reported that family members, church folk, and neighbours came to her aid with gifts of food and food preparation. This paper uses the diary of a female Pentecostal minister in rural and small-town western Canada to trace the connections between lived religion and family life in the mid-twentieth century. Agnes McAlister’s diary reveals that as a Pentecostal minister, family life was entwined with the other work she and her husband performed. As the McAlisters supplemented their income with paid work outside the church and raised their family, Agnes was much more than merely a “full-time pastor’s wife” as she once described herself. Indeed due to the demands of travel, health, and the needs of the extended family, Agnes McAlister sometimes

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performed a greater share of work than her husband, both in the realm of ministry and the family.

### ***The Diary***

In October 2012 I received a copy of the McAlister diary from Michael Wilkinson, a sociologist and leading scholar in Canadian Pentecostal studies from Trinity Western University.<sup>1</sup> Michael had acquired it from a member of the McAlister family and he recognized that because of my work in the gender history of Canadian Pentecostalism, I would be interested analyzing this document as a potential source for uncovering the experiences of a woman in ministry. Moreover, Agnes McAlister is not as well known as some of the others I have written about to-date, such as Aimee Semple McPherson, Zelma Argue, Beulah Argue Smith, Susie and Carro Davis, and Alice Belle Garrigus, and therefore her story represents a more grassroots picture. Although the family name “McAlister” was prominent in the bureaucracy and hierarchy of Canadian Pentecostal circles, Agnes and her husband Harvey’s ministry work did not include any appointments to the national governing body of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, unlike their more well-known McAlister relatives from Ontario.<sup>2</sup>

The diary I received was a typewritten, edited version of the original; Agnes herself had put it together in the 1990s. In it, she makes several retrospective comments, often prefaced with the phrase “My diary tells me . . .” Indeed, on numerous occasions Agnes confided to her readers, “My diary reminds me of many things that I do not remember.”<sup>3</sup> She also attempts to explain the gaps between entries in the original diary. For example, about the month of October 1944 she wrote, “There is nothing written in my diary for the next two weeks, but I know we had services every night except Mondays and Saturdays.”<sup>4</sup> Evidently, when the schedule became too full, there was no time to keep the diary. After an entry about summer camp in July, she wrote, “My diary has nothing written for the remaining part of 1947. Perhaps we were too busy.” When she resumed writing on 1 January 1948 she speculated, “Perhaps I had made a New Year’s resolution.”<sup>5</sup>

Though I made attempts through members of the McAlister family to gain access to the original, unedited diaries, it became clear that those original texts no longer exist and therefore no such comparison can be made. What is in hand, then, is 116 single-spaced, typewritten pages of

regular entries that Agnes McAlister wrote over a twenty-three-year period from her marriage to Harvey in March 1936 until the end of June 1959. Sometime in the 1990s,<sup>6</sup> Agnes reread her own diaries and typed the version of them that I received in 2012.

### ***The Diarist***

The diarist, Agnes Leverth McAlister (born 1913), was the daughter of Swedish immigrants who had arrived in the United States in 1900 as young adults and worked for five years in South Dakota. Before her parents got married, Agnes's mother found work as a cook in a hotel and her father as a farm labourer. By 1910, the Leverths were successful farmers on rented land when, on the prompting of family members who had already migrated to Canada, they made the decision to move to a place where, as Agnes said, "they, also, could have their own land."<sup>7</sup> The Leverths settled in Crooked Lake, Alberta, near the community of Wetaskiwin, approximately seventy kilometers (or forty miles) south of Edmonton. Agnes's father purchased from a homesteader a half section of land that included a log house, a log chicken coop, and a log barn. In that rural home, Agnes was born in December 1913.

The family religion in Sweden was Lutheran, but in Canada the Leverths became Pentecostal. In 1918 a Swedish itinerant preacher from Winnipeg, C.O. Nordin, travelled to their area bringing a Pentecostal message of Holy Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues. Agnes's mother and father were among the first to receive that message, and they offered part of their land to build a church. With that meeting place as a base, it is no surprise that their home was a centre of religious activity where itinerant preachers often stayed with their family. Agnes remembered scenes from her childhood of revival meetings where

Some people came and stood on some building scaffold that was outside, so they could see through the windows what was happening in the church. They possibly did see some things that were different from the classical church of that day. People would raise their hands as they loudly praised the Lord. Some may have been shaking, or weeping, or laughing. Some fell prostrate as the Holy Spirit moved in the church. We were called "Holy Rollers," although I don't remember seeing anyone roll. We did appreciate the anointing of the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup>

In 1929 Agnes turned sixteen and she moved, with her parents, to the town of Wetaskiwin so that she could attend secondary school. The Wetaskiwin Pentecostal church became their new church home. In the fall of 1932 she went to Normal School in Camrose to train as a teacher. She worked at her first teaching job, in the South Pigeon Lake School District about thirty miles from Wetaskiwin, until 1936 when she married Harvey C. McAlister (1914-1974), who had become the pastor of the Wetaskiwin Pentecostal Assembly the year before. Harvey McAlister's extended family was well known in Canadian Pentecostal circles because many of his relatives from the very large extended family, including his uncle R.E. McAlister, known as "the Father of Canadian Pentecostalism," were pillars of the church in the Ottawa Valley and across Western Canada. Many of them became national denominational leaders as the Pentecostal movement took hold and the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada was formally organized in the 1910s.<sup>9</sup> Agnes recalled that when she first met Harvey McAlister he was assisting in a service at her family's church while she was still in high school. She wrote, "I said to whoever I was sitting by, 'Another McAlister upstart trying to be a preacher.' Dear Lord, forgive me for my cynical comment."<sup>10</sup>

After their wedding in March 1936, Agnes finished out that teaching year and then quit her job. As she said, "At the end of June that year I quit being the teacher at South Pigeon Lake School and became a full time Pastor's wife."<sup>11</sup> Yet that comment about her change of employment belies the fact that Agnes McAlister was more than the spouse of a pastor. In fact she shared fully in the ministry when, according to her diary, she regularly preached at least one of the two sermons on any given Sunday. Moreover, her diary reveals that Agnes regularly redoubled her ministry efforts, taking on the full responsibility for running the church, sometimes for weeks at a time, when her husband was absent or unwell. At the same time, she gave birth to four children and her diary records the busy details of raising her family and living in more than six different communities over twenty years of ministry partnership with her husband.

### ***The Historiographic Context***

A study of what the rural and small town Pentecostal pastor, Agnes Leverth McAlister, said in her diary about family life can usefully be grounded in at least three different bodies of scholarship, and this essay attempts to join the conversation with those scholarly works: first, with

historians of women who use memory sources, particularly diaries and journals; second, with Pentecostal scholarship that explores gender constructions and lived religious experiences, particularly those of women in ministry; and finally, with scholarship about working-class family life, including the cultural meanings attached to food, the consumption patterns of rural family life in the postwar, and the unpaid work of caregiving.

When women's history was still gaining traction in the larger discipline of history during the 1970s and 1980s, scholars discussed the innovation of turning to women's own writing to hear the voice of historical actors who were neither famous nor published. There are many debates about using such records, including how representative they might be, how fragmented they sometimes become, and how to situate such texts into a wider context. Yet despite those challenges, there is no question that diaries and journals are an important form of ethnography that can be explored in a variety of ways.

Identifying and interrogating sources that give access to women's own voices is no longer a novel approach for historians, although it was regarded that way just a few decades ago.<sup>12</sup> With the emergence of women's history almost fifty years ago, scholars recognized that studying women's experiences would require a degree of creativity in searching for and using source materials that had previously been overlooked or undervalued. So-called "non-traditional sources" were a hallmark of the turn toward the new social history in general, and toward women's history in particular. As social history and women's history gained momentum in the 1970s and 1980s, the quest to find the voices of so-called "ordinary" women also accelerated, as did attention to the everyday experiences of more public figures. Interdisciplinary influences also served women's history well in guiding the use of diaries and other memory sources.

Rural scholarship, using diaries, journals, interviews, and other ethnographic source materials, is a rich field as the work of Catherine Wilson, Andrea Gal, and Emily Weiskopf-Ball illustrates.<sup>13</sup> My essay intersects with gender history, in particular that of women and religion, specifically Pentecostal women.<sup>14</sup> In the realm of Pentecostal studies, there has been a long-standing call for attention to women's experiences, beginning with David Roebuck's call almost twenty years ago, for additional biographical studies of women's biography to be made.<sup>15</sup> American scholars of Pentecostalism, including Estelda Alexander, Edith Blumhofer, Abraham Ruelas, and a growing list of others, have answered that call to provide biographical studies of prominent Pentecostal

women.<sup>16</sup> Beyond recovering those stories, attention is also being given to theoretical perspectives on the institutionalization of religion and the promise of gender theory for understanding Pentecostal women's history.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, there is convergence between works in religious studies and those in social history given the turn toward a "lived religion" approach where the everyday experiences of believers are mined for evidence about how spirituality is enacted in the quotidian details of life. Scholars such as David Hall and Meredith McGuire both call for this kind of attention to lived religion, and, in Canadian scholarship, the work of Marguerite Van Die is a good example of this approach.<sup>18</sup>

Agnes McAlister's diary provides a prime example of a source that can allow for an exploration of family life and religion and specifically of gender, ministry, and lived religion in the context of Pentecostalism's growth in Canada at mid-century. Because Agnes worked with her husband as a co-pastor while she gave birth to four children between 1938 and 1953, and because she moved her household more than half a dozen times to accommodate the ministry work she shared with her husband, McAlister's diary offers a rare glimpse into the workings of ministerial family life.<sup>19</sup> Even with the silences borne of the diary's characteristic "gaps" when the demands of family life and ministry responsibilities meant she was too busy to find the time to write, the diary provides a rare glimpse into the daily, weekly, and seasonal rhythms of a Pentecostal minister's family at mid-century. That the pastor was female is particularly important because it provides a record of a woman in a rural and small-town setting who was simultaneously fulfilling the roles of pastor, wife, mother, daughter, and friend.

Among the personal papers that Agnes McAlister left for her family, in addition to the typed version of the diary, she wrote a document entitled "My Story" that outlined her family's history and immigration experience arriving in Canada. In the preface to that document she remarked,

My mother always said that God had directed her path through life. As a child I heard her story many times, and always the theme was: "God must have been in it all." With this thought in mind, I would like to think that everyone, who has some connection with this family, would know that we, indeed, have a rich heritage. God wants us to live, as children of God, serving and loving Him.<sup>20</sup>

With that clear statement as preface to the writing of her life story, it seems likely that Agnes McAlister retyped her diary as an extension of

that same purpose, and her writing was an exercise in identity formation. She overtly declared that her purpose in writing was to preserve her story for future generations, reminding them that they had a “rich heritage” as Pentecostal people, and that it was their destiny also “to live, as children of God, serving and loving Him.”

### ***Family and Food: Symbol of Celebration***

Looking at McAlister’s diaries with a focus on food, one observes that, just as scholars of food studies suggest, the cultural meanings attached to food are multi-faceted. First, one can see that Agnes’s diary makes clear that she associated certain foods with family identity and celebrations. While she makes some mention of Swedish foods, including cookies and breads, her parents quickly embraced the foodways of their new country. Recounting her parents’ immigrant experiences before their marriage, she recorded “Mother soon found a job in a hotel, where she learned the American style of cooking. I can still taste her lemon pies.”<sup>21</sup> And during her childhood in rural Alberta, she remembered “waiting eagerly to hear the clatter of the wagon, which meant dad would soon be home. He brought the groceries and anything we needed from town. Usually there was a chocolate bar for me.”<sup>22</sup>

When Agnes grew up food remained central for her and she spoke about it frequently in her diary. Like all housewives and mothers in the mid-twentieth century, it was Agnes’s job to plan and provide meals for her family.<sup>23</sup> But because of the nature of Agnes McAlister’s multiple roles, as wife, mother, homemaker, and pastor, her work with food was particularly demanding. Speaking about 1942, she wrote “The summer months were filled with meetings, visiting our people, working on the church building, entertaining visitors, and keeping our table filled with food.”<sup>24</sup> Though she was a pastor in her own right, Agnes McAlister was also the pastor’s wife, and in that role she often was expected to provide meals for visitors, as well as overnight accommodation for guest speakers and church workers. She frequently recorded that she was part of other food events at the church as well, such as the farewell party that the church hosted for a young woman who had been working with the children in their church as part of her bible school placement work during the summer. In September, as the student was preparing to leave for the bible school in Victoria, BC, Agnes recorded “After the Tuesday night Gospel hour we had a farewell party for Opal. We gave her a handkerchief shower

and afterwards, had tea, sandwiches and cake.”<sup>25</sup>

But Agnes was also a mother, and in that role she continued the emphasis from her childhood on special foods and treats for her children, especially around important family celebrations such as birthdays. Invariably, her diary reports that birthdays were celebrated with visitors and presents, and Agnes provided cake. When Grace turned four in October 1942, Agnes recorded the names of twelve people, children and adults from their church, who came to the party. On the menu, there were “two cakes and pumpkin tarts.”<sup>26</sup> When the McAlisters moved to Drumheller in 1946, their household continued to be a busy one. For several months in 1947 they had at least two extra people living with them – a high school student and a children’s worker. Those two women baked the birthday cake for Grace’s party since Agnes had been travelling. As Agnes reviewed her diary and retyped it, she added this explanation about birthday celebrations during their years in Stettler: “We usually celebrated the children’s birthdays in some way. We would often have ice cream. We did not have a fridge that year, so ice cream was only on special occasions.”<sup>27</sup>

### ***Family and Finances***

For the McAlisters, family life in the postwar years was not characterized by upward mobility or greater financial security. As they moved from one church assignment to the next, their years in Stettler from 1950 to 1956 were particularly challenging financially, and this was reflected in the food they ate and how they celebrated special occasions. When financial hardship was ever-present, community life was a central part of their family experience. “On [January] the 16<sup>th</sup> [1952], the Hart family and ourselves were invited to the Petersen’s [sic] for a turkey dinner to celebrate their boys’ (Ted and Doug) birthdays. It was cold that evening – minus twenty degrees Fahrenheit. During our stay in Stettler we had many good dinners and precious times of fellowship in the Petersen home in Botha.”<sup>28</sup> In her article “Stocking the Root Cellar: Foodscapes in the Peace River Region,” Megan J. Davies notes “memories of food tend to emphasize the social relations around food and foodways.”<sup>29</sup>

While Agnes clearly valued times of celebration and socializing as special memories, the fact is that it was difficult to make ends meet on a pastor’s salary. As a result, Agnes often mentioned in her diary what she saw as signs of God’s provision for her family. Food scholars have noted



the place of food in religious expression, but most of those studies focus on ceremonial foods such as the bread and the wine used in observing the Christian sacraments.<sup>30</sup> Much less attention has been paid to the religious symbolism imbedded in everyday foods and their provisioning. Agnes recorded in her diary that while they lived in Kamloops, “The Harringtons, one of our church families, were very faithful to bring us produce from their farm. We had visited at their home where we picked plums. They also gave us tomatoes, apples, watermelon and cantaloupe.”<sup>31</sup> Agnes frequently recorded her late summer and harvest-time work with entries such as this one from September 1942: “I see by my diary that I was busy canning pears and plums. We also went to Penticton, and out to Kaledan. The Dunns, Prestons, and Lockharts lived there. We came home with more fruit, especially peaches.”<sup>32</sup> That seasonal work relied on the generosity of church members who provided Agnes with valuable fresh produce so that she could preserve it for the coming winter:

I canned fifteen quarts of peaches, some more plums, and one quart of pears. The Dunns from Kaledan had sent us fruit. The Harringtons had given us tomatoes, plums, and apples. They were always faithful with vegetables and eggs. The Hannahs, too, often gave us produce.<sup>33</sup>

When the McAlisters lived in Stettler from 1950 to 1956, they were establishing a new church (“a church plant” in current evangelical language) and therefore they did not have a strong financial base of support. As Agnes recorded, “The offerings in our church were not large enough to pay the bills for heat, light and water plus the various renovations but God did supply our needs in so many different ways. I remember one day a Mr. Whiteside, who worked in the oil fields, came rushing in, and asked me if I had a receipt book. He gave us money that paid for the coal we so needed to keep warm. The church in Wetaskiwin sent us an offering. Friends in Edmonton, Roy Dickinson and the Kendricks sent us money. We certainly praised the Lord for His care.”<sup>34</sup> This kind of mutual support that the McAlisters received from family members, neighbours, and parishioners sounds like Depression-era strategies for making ends meet.<sup>35</sup> Agnes explained in her diary that “Harvey did not have a steady job that year [beyond his church work], but worked where ever he was needed.” In order to provide for themselves and their growing family, the McAlisters depended on gifts from various sources. Agnes wrote a long entry in her edited diary about this in which she summarized the gifts they

received in 1950-51:

The people of Stettler were very friendly as we visited with them and invited them to our church functions. Mr. Martin, our neighbor next door, brought us a chicken . . . Mr. Gillespy, who sometimes came to our church, gave us a chicken. Harvey visited a Mrs. Shilling to invite her children to Sunday School, she gave us a pork roast. Mr. and Mrs. Porter were an elderly couple that we visited, he was bedfast with arthritis . . . Mrs. Porter gave me a jar of corn, another time they gave Harvey a big furry brown overcoat. The Petersens were always generous with their farm produce, they often brought us cream and milk. We had a garden out on their farm that summer, and in August I was canning vegetables. In October we picked six sacks of potatoes and a half sack of carrots. We picked peas in Bob and Donna Haring's garden, from which I canned nine quarts. The Huckle family from Alix had come to our church and had asked for some fruit jars, I had given her two dozen. As we came home from visiting my parents in Wetaskiwin in February nineteen fifty one, we stopped to see the Huckles in Alix. We had coffee with them, and before we left she gave us twenty-four jars of saskatoons and some vegetables.<sup>36</sup>

While that kind of generous sharing of foodstuffs was not an uncommon act in rural culture, Agnes reflected on the many providers of food and other items and ascribed a higher meaning to their acts of neighborly generosity. For Agnes this was something more than simple human kindness. Imbuing the provision that came through those people with religious meaning, Agnes expressed gratitude as she concluded, "God certainly did provide for us."<sup>37</sup>

In addition to recording the celebrations of family and friendship, it is clear that shared meals, gifts of food, a secondhand coat, and money to buy fuel were more than just human exchanges to Agnes McAlister. The diary makes clear that she saw these gestures as one of the concrete ways that God took care of her and her family. In her experience of lived religion, she attributed spiritual significance to the everyday experiences of food, friendship, and finances. For Agnes these were all aspects of God's provision.

### ***Family and Female Labour: The Work of Caring***

A third way of reading the entries that Agnes made about family life

is to think of how she described the unpaid female labour that is part and parcel of family life. Here, the diary makes clear that Agnes recognized the work of other women in her community and how their offers of help were a godsend to her. At the same time, Agnes was called upon to make an extra effort, sometimes because of her husband's travels and sometimes because of his ill health. Added to this, there was the responsibility of caring for two sets of aging parents since Agnes and Harvey remained relatively close to both the McAlisters and the Leverths throughout their years in ministry.

For Agnes McAlister with her busy life of ministry work, as well as her household responsibilities, she sometimes lacked the available time to accomplish all the aspects of household management that fell to her, including food preparation and planning for celebrations.<sup>38</sup> When that was the case, female friends and community members came to her aid. Her diary typically notes that on any given Sunday, Agnes would preach the sermon in the morning service and Harvey would preach in the evening or vice versa. The point is that she was a full partner in ministry with her husband. While her diary reveals that there was a weekly rhythm to Agnes's housework and food work, with Saturday a day for housecleaning and baking in preparation for Sunday, sometimes that weekly routine was interrupted by the additional chores of seasonal food preservation work, especially in late summer and fall. Often that work was shared between women. In September 1944, for example, Agnes recorded that "Mrs. Lindahl brought her pressure cooker and we canned twenty five quarts of tomatoes, and ten of plums."<sup>39</sup>

For Agnes McAlister, the Pentecostal minister, it was not just the seasonal rhythm of harvest time, but also the church calendar that made her unpaid domestic work more intense. In the winter of 1950, when Harvey travelled to Toronto on church business for a month to attend a national Sunday School convention, Agnes was left to take care of the family and, as her diary records, "I was in charge of the Sunday services for the next three weeks."<sup>40</sup> During this particularly demanding period of her family life and church work, her son's birthday approached and Agnes seemed relieved to report "Mrs. Crowell had brought me cake and cookies so I didn't need to bake for the birthday on February 27<sup>th</sup>."<sup>41</sup>

At least once a year the McAlisters' churches held revival meetings that might last for a period of two to four weeks or longer with daily church services through the week and multiple services on Sundays. During these special meetings, Agnes might preach, provide music for the

services, or lead prayer meetings. The services themselves typically lasted for several hours. But in addition to that church work, Agnes was usually responsible to host the guest preachers and musicians in her own home. The extra work of having multiple house guests, particularly on a tight household budget, was a source of stress. Yet, in those periods Agnes recorded that other women in the church often came to her aid. Sometimes that aid took the form of food provided or a dinner invitation to feed the guests in their home to give the McAlisters a break. For example, in February 1959, the McAlisters hosted a series of meetings in their church with traveling evangelists, Minnie and Hilda Mueller, two sisters. Agnes recorded in her diary that the guests arrived on Saturday, 7 February and stayed until Monday, 2 March. During that time, there were meetings every night except Mondays, with multiple meetings on Sunday, and Agnes was busy not only hosting the guests, but also leading services. She records how women from the church helped her to provide meals for these guests with these entries: "On Thursday, Mrs. Ley brought the dinner, 'All in One'"; "Mrs. Davies sent us two pies"; "The next day the Mueller sisters were at Volstads for dinner"; and "Sunday was a very good day in the House of the Lord. The Mueller sisters went to the Sinclair's [sic] for dinner."<sup>42</sup>

While these entries might be regarded as a further extension of "God's provision," the way that Agnes recorded the gifts of labour she received from friends and neighbours suggests that she thought of these differently. Most often her comment was "the Lord bless them" and what she indicated was her good wishes, even gratitude, for the people who recognized the double load she was carrying as minister and homemaker. She asked the Lord's blessing on these other women for their acts of service and their gifts in kind. In a sense, the people who assisted Agnes with her unpaid work of hosting and providing meals were recognizing that, as a woman working in ministry, Agnes could not fulfill all the demands placed on her. For the women who stepped in to help her, those gifts of food, time, and labour were probably more than gestures of friendship. They may, in fact, have been a form of offering made by women who themselves did not have extra cash to donate, but who could make gifts of their own work.

Not only was the extra work of food preparation time consuming, but feeding additional people also meant added expense for the McAlisters' meager household budget. Recognizing those realities, women around Agnes extended their own homemaking skills and shared from

their pantries and larders to assist her. In light of the scholarship that emphasizes how much food work was concentrated in the hands of the mothers of households, this informal arrangement among Agnes and her friends and female parishioners is significant. It illustrates that the women who assisted her recognized and valued her unpaid work as hostess, but in coming alongside her they also validated her paid work as a church minister. They exercised the opportunity to express their own faith in a concrete way by providing for Agnes in her time of need. These provisions, then, were part of the lived religion of Agnes's friends and parishioners.

Agnes's diary also gives clues about the strain that was placed upon her by the work of caring for her husband's health concerns and their aging parents' needs. Harvey McAlister was a sensitive individual and the diary hints at the fact that he found it very difficult to cope with the stress of managing church affairs, particularly when church business meetings called his performance into question. In the summer of 1945 Agnes wrote: "On Sunday, August 5<sup>th</sup> it says, 'Harvey not so well, I spoke all day. God certainly helps us.' On August 8<sup>th</sup> the diary says, 'Harvey still not so well but better. Praise God.' On August 9<sup>th</sup> 'Business meeting tonight. Accepted our resignation. God is still leading his dear children along. Amen!'" For the next two weeks, the services were covered by the visit of "the McColl Girard[sic] trio," and then "Sunday, August 26<sup>th</sup>, was our last Sunday in Kamloops. My diary says, 'A big day and heavy, but God helped us. Blessed be His Name! The radio program went OK, but all very difficult.'" <sup>43</sup>

For the next six months, Harvey and Agnes were not involved in full-time ministry, although her diary records that they considered a pastorate in Abbotsford, BC. When Agnes went back over her diary to edit it, she remarked, "This is something I do not remember at all, nor does my diary give me any clue concerning this. Either we did not let our name stand, or if we did, we did not receive a majority vote."<sup>44</sup> During this interlude between pastoral postings, the McAlisters retreated to Wetaskiwin to her parents' farm and Harvey spent some time in Edmonton working at his brother's service station during the week. They still owned a small home on 149<sup>th</sup> Street in Edmonton, and after their tenants moved out, the McAlisters moved back in, though they would be staying there less than four months. They enjoyed being close to Harvey's parents who also lived in Edmonton, and they made regular visits to visit her parents on the short drive to Wetaskiwin. On weekends, the family attended the

Edmonton Pentecostal Tabernacle and several times they spoke or sang at other, smaller churches or on the radio. Harvey supported his family during this time with the work he found at his brother's service station. Agnes gave an indicator of how disruptive this period was for their family life when her diary recorded that, in February 1946, they were moving again to take up the position of interim pastor of a church in Drumheller. "I don't believe that either Harvey, or I, had thought that our stay in the little house on 149<sup>th</sup> street would be only be for four short months . . . I don't think Grace was too happy about this move. This would be the third school that she attended in grade two."<sup>45</sup>

In addition to balancing the needs of her husband and her children, Agnes had close relations with her own parents and her in-laws. During the Kamloops years, Mrs. McAlister came to live with Harvey and Agnes for two months, from February to April 1945. In Drumheller, the Leverths moved from their farm in Wetaskiwin to spend the winter of 1947 in a rented apartment next door to the church to be close to Agnes and her family. Agnes revealed to her diary in March of that year that she was pregnant with their third child, and no doubt she appreciated having her mother next door to help with some of the extra domestic tasks. For example, Mrs. Leverth baked apple pies on 22 March and it is likely that those pies were served to the next round of house guests who came to minister in the church a few days later.<sup>46</sup> Just a month later, Agnes recorded that her mother-in-law, who had not been well for some time, suffered another stroke. Harvey went to Edmonton for a brief visit with her, and then "On Tuesday, May 13<sup>th</sup>, Grandma McAlister in Edmonton went home to Glory. The funeral was on Saturday." Harvey attended the funeral, but Agnes did not travel with him, as she explained, "perhaps it was because our baby was soon to arrive, or maybe we felt I needed to be home for the Sunday services."<sup>47</sup> At eight and a half months pregnant, Agnes did not preach that week, but records the names of the two visiting ministers who took the morning and evening services. Two weeks later, the McAlisters' baby girl was born on 2 June, and Agnes explained that their second daughter was named "after her two grandmothers Beulah Anna Matilda."<sup>48</sup> After some notes about the camp meetings they attended in the summer of 1947, Agnes observed when she revisited her diary years later, "My diary has nothing written for the remaining part of 1947. Perhaps we were too busy."<sup>49</sup> Yes, perhaps they were!

**Conclusion**

Agnes McAlister's mid-twentieth century diary provides rich insight into the family life of a Pentecostal woman in ministry. First, it illustrates how she attributed many different cultural meanings to the place of food in family life. From the simple records about children's birthday parties, church functions, and meals shared with friends, it is clear that certain foods, because of their scarcity, took on particular significance as symbols of family celebration, like ice cream at a birthday party. Moreover, when young families gathered to share a meal, they were not only sharing food, but also building social relationships, or as Agnes said "sharing sweet times of fellowship."

Second, when offerings were small and the pastors' family was growing, finances were tight. Harvey and Agnes supplemented their income with other paid work (he with manual labour jobs, she as a supply teacher). At the same time, when rural parishioners shared the bounty of their harvest or provided the preachers' family with a chicken, a jar of preserved fruit, a secondhand winter coat, or money for a load of coal, those items took on religious meaning for Agnes McAlister. Although such gifts came to her through the hands of her neighbours or friends, she recognized and recorded them as provisions that came directly from God. When family finances were inadequate, McAlister told her diary that such friendly gestures were actually much more than human kindness. Instead, she encouraged her readers to see them as proof of God's faithfulness to provide for her family's needs.

Third, McAlister's diary reveals important aspects of unpaid female labour within the family. When Agnes McAlister's ministry work demanded her time and energy, other women came to her aid as they shared the domestic work by dropping off a prepared meal, baking her child's birthday cake, or inviting her house guests to supper to give her a much needed break and to relieve the strain on her family budget. Agnes McAlister's female friends generously shared their gifts of domestic labour with her. Those acts can also be read as peer recognition because other women validated her multiple roles by stepping in to assist with her unpaid work as a homemaker, and, in doing so, they endorsed her formal ministry work as preacher and church leader.

While Agnes kept up with the very full schedule of ministry and motherhood, there were still more demands on her time as she was caregiver to her husband and extended family. Because her husband's

health was sometimes fragile, she assumed extra work by protecting him after difficult church business meetings, encouraging him to take long breaks from church work, and taking up more than her share of preaching. Living close enough to both sets of aging parents that they could drive to them within several hours, Agnes and Harvey frequently traveled to their parents' homes to assist with household tasks, include them in family celebrations, and tend to their increasing health needs. At other times, the parents came to be with Agnes and Harvey for extended visits during the winter months.

Agnes McAlister wrote and edited her diary for her family to communicate to the younger members that as Pentecostals who were called to ministry positions, they should expect to "live by faith," and, in exchange, they would witness the faithful provision and blessing of God. Yet her record of family life goes well beyond that purpose of family identity formation. The McAlister text provides a fascinating example of how memory sources like diaries and memoirs can be useful for gender history. Specifically, this diary offers an intimate portrait of the family life of a Pentecostal woman in ministry, serving as a useful case study of the gender dynamics of shared ministry and illustrating just how diminishing and misleading the title "pastor's wife" often is. Beyond Pentecostal studies, the McAlister diary is useful for students of religion because of what it reveals about aspects of family life and ministry at mid-century. For the McAlisters, and surely for many other ministerial families in small rural parishes of various denominations in the 1940s and 1950s, to "live by faith" meant to live outside the context of suburban postwar prosperity and beyond carefully scripted stereotypes about who did the breadwinning and who did the caregiving. The McAlisters relied on God to provide for them, and it seems God often relied on the generosity of the ministers' friends, neighbours, and parishioners. Thus the family lives of those who served the church and "lived by faith" were entwined very closely as acts of lived religion performed by them and by other people.

### ***Endnotes***

1. Michael Wilkinson, ed., *Canadian Pentecostalism: Transition and Transformation*. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010); Michael Wilkinson and Peter Althouse, eds., *Winds from the North: Canadian Contributions to the Pentecostal Movement* (Leiden & Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2010); and Michael Wilkinson and Steven M. Studebaker, eds., *A Liberating Spirit: Pentecostals and Social Action in North*



*America* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010).

2. McAlisters were central to the organization of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (hereafter PAOC). Members of Harvey's extended family, especially Walter McAlister and R.E. McAlister, were important figures in the early days of the PAOC administration and leadership.
3. "Kamloops," 10, Agnes Leverth McAlister Diary, Private Collection (hereafter ALM Diary).
4. "Kamloops," 17, ALM Diary.
5. "Drumheller," 7, ALM Diary. Three years later she wrote something very similar: "Perhaps I made a New Year's resolution to write in my diary, since I began writing again on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1951." "Stettler," 3, ALM Diary.
6. There are several indications in the diary that help to date the rewritten text to the late 1990s. This estimate is based on two comments Agnes wrote: first, when she was attempting to retrace the travels that she and Harvey had made in the first five years of their marriage. Referring to an entry where she had mentioned a community named "Belton" that they had passed through on a road trip in 1941, she wrote this editorial comment: "There seems to be no place now (fifty-five years later) [sic] named Belton." Second, Agnes referenced Harvey's cousin, Florence Steele, who worked as a nurse by saying "As of 1998 she is still living in Kamloops." "Kamloops," 22, ALM Diary.
7. "Harvey and Agnes," 3, ALM Diary.
8. "Harvey and Agnes," 8, ALM Diary; "Kamloops," 19, ALM Diary.
9. Indeed, so many members of the McAlister family were involved in the leadership of the PAOC that it is difficult to sort out their names and involvements. More than fifteen pages of a history of Canadian Pentecostalism is devoted to the McAlister family tree because Harvey McAlister's grandparents, James and Margaret (Brown) McAlister, had thirteen children, many of whom were involved in PAOC ministries, as were their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. See Douglas Rudd, *When the Spirit Came Upon Them: Highlights from the Early Years of the Pentecostal Movement in Canada* (Mississauga, ON: Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, 2002), 129-45.
10. "Harvey and Agnes," 2, ALM Diary.
11. "Harvey and Agnes," 3, ALM Diary.
12. For a recent overview of the trends in writing women's biographies and of using memory sources such as diaries see Susan Ware, "Writing Women's Lives: One Historian's Perspective," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* XL,

- no. 3 (Winter 2010): 413-35.
13. Some examples include the work of Catherine Wilson (University of Guelph), Andrea Gal (Wilfrid Laurier University), and Emily Weiskopf-Ball (Laurentian University).
  14. Linda M. Ambrose and Leah Payne, "Reflections on the Potential of Gender Theory for North American Pentecostal History," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 36, no. 1 (2014): 45-63; and Linda M. Ambrose, "Thinking Through the Methodological and Theoretical Quandaries of Gender and Canadian Pentecostal History," *Canadian Journal of Pentecostal Charismatic Christianity* 3 (2012): 70-88.
  15. David Roebuck, "Perfect Liberty to Preach the Gospel: Women Ministers in the Church of God," *Pneuma* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 25-32; and David Roebuck, "Pentecostal Women in Ministry: A Review of Selected Documents," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 16, no. 1 (2006): 29-44.
  16. Estrelida Alexander, *The Women of Azusa Street* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2005); Estrelida Alexander, *Limited Liberty: The Legacy of Four Pentecostal Women Pioneers* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2008); Estrelida Alexander and Amos Yong, eds., *Philip's Daughters: Women in Pentecostal-Charismatic Leadership* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009); Edith L. Blumhofer, *Aimee Semple McPherson: Everybody's Sister* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); and Abraham Ruelas, *No Room for Doubt: The Life and Ministry of Bebe Patten* (Laurel, MD: The Seymour Press, 2012).
  17. Ambrose and Payne, "Reflections on the Potential of Gender Theory," 45-63. That work builds on earlier scholarly work calling for a reconsideration of women and Pentecostalism. See for example Charles H. Barfoot and Gerald T. Sheppard, "Prophetic vs. Priestly Religion: the Changing Role of Women Clergy in Classical Pentecostal Churches," *Review of Religious Research* 22, no. 1 (1980): 2-17; Edith L. Blumhofer, "Women in American Pentecostalism," *Pneuma* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 19-20; and Pamela Holmes, "The 'Place' of Women in Pentecostal/Charismatic Ministry since the Azusa Street Revival," in *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy*, eds. Harold D. Hunter and Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2006).
  18. David Hall, *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Robert Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude:*

*Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Marguerite Van Die, *Religion, Family and Community in Victorian Canada: The Colbys of Carrollcroft* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007); and Marguerite Van Die, "'But have you kept the faith of your Ancestors?' Musings on the Writing and Teaching of the History of Christianity in a Secular Canada," in *Christian Thought for the 21st Century: Agenda for the Future*, eds. Tina Ruparell and Douglas Shantz (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012).

19. The children were Grace Harvena, born October 3, 1938; Jim, born February 27, 1944; Beulah, born June 2, 1947; and David Albin, born September 5, 1953. The McAlisters moved frequently in the first years of their marriage, and returned to their parents' homes in Edmonton, Wetaskiwin, or Sylvan Lake, Alberta to spend summer vacations and times between ministry postings. After 1940, the diary is organized into four sections corresponding to their ministry locations at Kamloops, BC 1941-1945; Drumheller, AB 1946-1950; Stettler, AB 1950-1956; and Claresholm, AB 1956-1959.
20. "My Story," 1, Agnes McAlister (nee Leverth) [sic], Personal Collection.
21. "My Story," 2, Agnes McAlister (nee Leverth) [sic], Personal Collection.
22. "My Story," 4, Agnes McAlister (nee Leverth) [sic], Personal Collection.
23. On food and "the significant roles played by mothers who lived in rural settings" see the chapters in Franca Iacovetta, Valerie Korinek, and Marlene Epp, eds., *Edible Histories Cultural Politics: Toward a Canadian Food History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), especially those by Stacey Zembrzycki, Caroline Durand, S. Holyck Hunchuck, Julie Guard, Andrea Eidinger, Marlene Epp, and Sonia Cancian. See also Royden Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and New Worlds, 1850-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), and also his *Ethnic Farm Culture in Western Canada*, Canada's Ethnic Group Series, Booklet No. 29 (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 2002).
24. "Kamloops," 5, ALM Diary.
25. "Kamloops," 6, ALM Diary.
26. "Kamloops," 7, ALM Diary. On another occasion, when Jimmy turned one, Agnes hosted a party for him and for another child who was turning five. See "Kamloops," 19, ALM Diary.
27. "Stettler," 7, ALM Diary.
28. "Stettler," 8, ALM Diary.

29. Megan J. Davies, "Stocking the Root Cellar: Foodscapes in the Peace River Region" in *Edible Histories Cultural Politics*, 95. On this point Davies footnotes D. Lupton, "Food, Memory and Meaning: The Symbolic and Social Nature of Food Events," *Sociological Review* 42, no. 4 (1994): 664-85.
30. See, for example, Michel Desjardins and Ellen Desjardins, "The Role of Food in Canadian Expressions of Christianity," in *Edible Histories Cultural Politics*, 70-82.
31. "Kamloops," 6, ALM Diary.
32. "Kamloops," 6, ALM Diary.
33. "Kamloops," 16, ALM Diary.
34. "Stettler," 7, ALM Diary.
35. See for example Stacey Zembrzycki, "'We Didn't Have a Lot of Money, but We Had Food': Ukrainians and Their Depression-Era Food Memories," in *Edible Histories Cultural Politics*, 131-39.
36. "Stettler," 7, ALM Diary.
37. "Stettler," 7, ALM Diary.
38. Meg Luxton, "Two Hands for the Clock: Changing Patterns in the Gendered Division of Labour," *Studies in Political Economy* 12 (1983): 27-44.
39. "Kamloops," 16, ALM Diary.
40. "Drumheller," 13, ALM Diary.
41. "Drumheller," 13, ALM Diary.
42. "Claresholm," 36, ALM Diary.
43. "Kamloops," 21, ALM Diary.
44. "Kamloops," 22, ALM Diary.
45. "Kamloops," 23, ALM Diary.
46. "Drumheller," 5, ALM Diary.
47. "Drumheller," 5, ALM Diary.
48. "Drumheller," 6, ALM Diary.
49. "Drumheller," 7, ALM Diary.