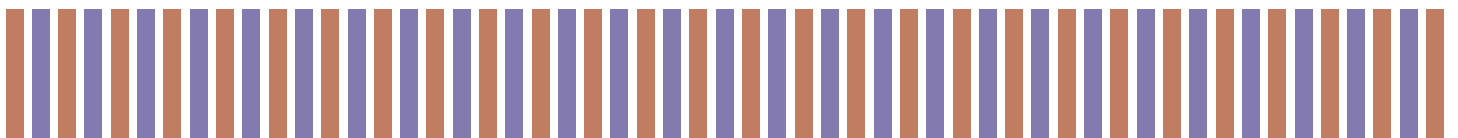
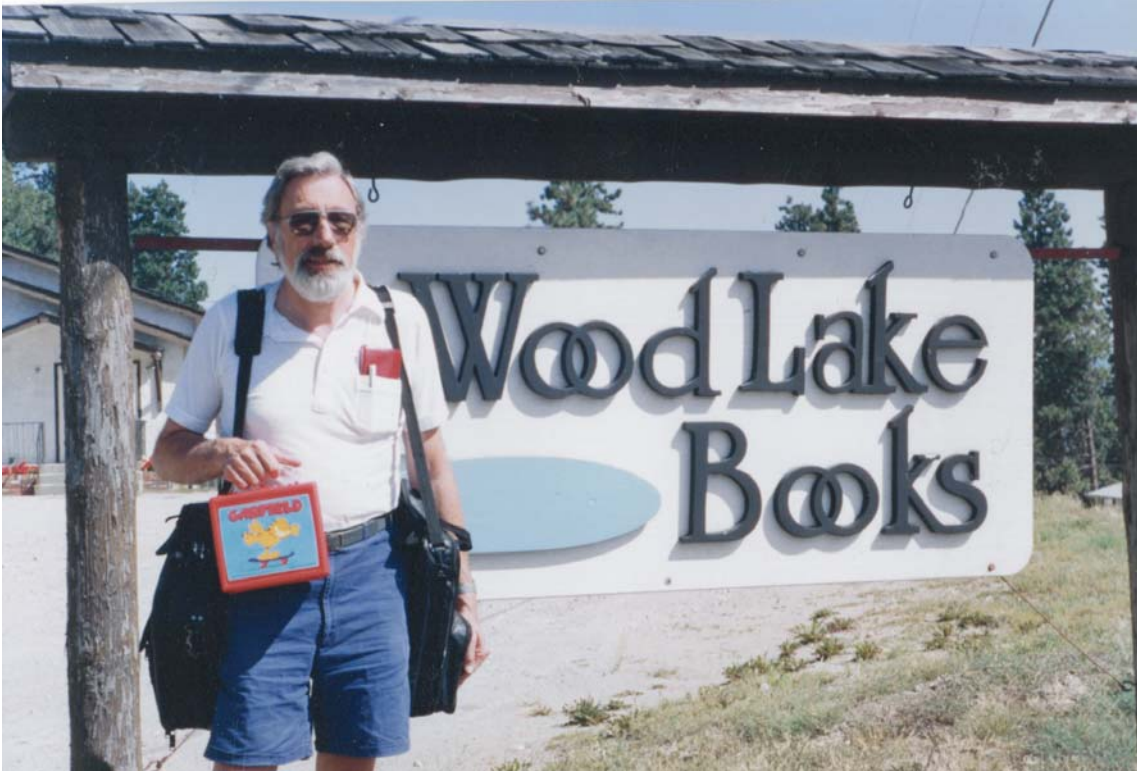




40 YEARS

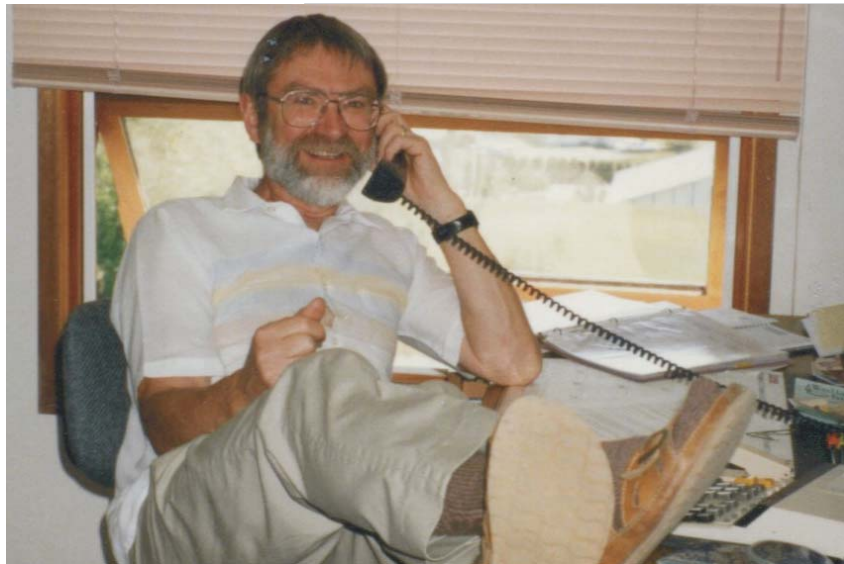
CELEBRATING **WOOD LAKE** PUBLISHING





Top: Ralph Milton – it's off to work I go.

Bottom: Jim Taylor – another day at the office.



■ 40 YEARS

— Celebrating
Wood Lake Publishing

■ IN THE BEGINNING

Wood Lake Publishing began on the ping pong table in Ralph Milton's Calgary home

"For many, Wood Lake wasn't just a job. It was a place that held us when we needed to be held and gave us a dream and support and encouragement when we most needed those things. The result was a blossoming of all kinds of wonderful things. I include myself among those unnamed "many." It is for the dream, the holding, and the opportunity that I am most grateful." – Bev Milton

For Wood Lake, the lines between corporate and personal identity may remain forever fuzzy. To talk about Wood Lake is, as much as anything else, to talk about people. It is to discover that strange and wonderful dynamic whereby personalities meet, and unite to spin new worlds of possibility. It seems only fitting, then, to begin with the company's founders.

■ RALPH MILTON

Ralph had attended a career evaluation seminar and had come to the conclusion that he wanted to be a writer. He wrestled with the idea long and hard: "It was not easy for me to give up the security of a regular pay cheque. Was this really what I should be doing?" Ralph called together a couple of his friends, people whose advice he could trust. They spent a day together. By the end of that day there really wasn't anything else to say. His friends looked him square in the eye and said, "Why don't you?" Despite whatever fears he may still have harbored, he couldn't think of a good reason. At the same time, his wife Bev had decided that she really wanted a full-time position and a career of her own. "It's my turn," she announced. "This time I follow my career and you follow me." In the end, they made the decision with fear and trembling. Bev would seek a full-time position and become the wage earner. Ralph would quit his job and become a house parent to two teenagers, and a freelance writer.

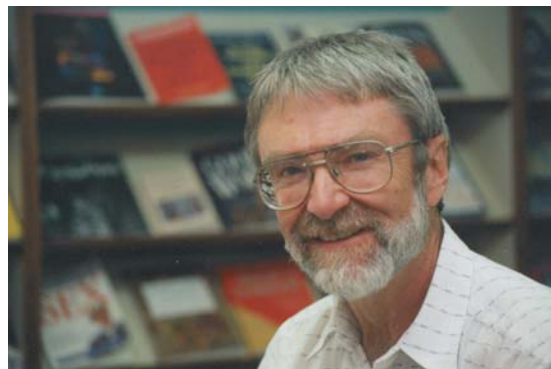
■ JIM TAYLOR

Jim met Joan at the University of British Columbia. It was her second day on campus and her first year taking a teaching major in Home Economics. Jim was a senior, majoring in Mathematics and English. By the time graduation rolled around later that year, Jim still had no idea what he wanted to do with the rest of his life, but he knew he wanted to spend the summer near Joan.

Jim spent the next three years writing commercials and doing radio production. During that time Joan finished her third year at university. In 1960, they got married. In much the same way as Ralph had, he got tired of seeing people as dollar signs.

In 1964, Jim got a job working in radio in Prince Rupert. While he was in the editing studio, Easter week 1968, cutting little pieces of tape and sticking them back together again, he received a phone call from Al Forrest, then editor of the *United Church Observer*. Would Jim come to Toronto and work for the *Observer* as a staff writer? The job was exactly what Jim had been looking for.

It was a chance to get out of Prince Rupert. They moved to Toronto. After one year as a staff writer, Jim became managing editor. His new duties allowed him to travel the world to do interviews. He usually wrote at least one article per issue, sometimes two or three. He learned the elements of good design and supervised the layout of the entire magazine.



Top: Jim Taylor – author and co-founder of Wood Lake

Above: Joan and Jim Taylor – at Jim's retirement party in the mid 90s.

■
40 YEARS

—
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Top: Ralph & Jim – Best friends and business partners .

Bottom: Bev & Ralph Milton & Joan & Jim Taylor – the company's founders.

■ FRIENDSHIP

Initially, Ralph Milton wasn't much more than a name attached to some articles that crossed Jim's desk at the *Observer*. Ralph had discovered that some of the television programs he produced for Alberta-Interfaith could often be made into magazine articles. For his part, Jim encouraged Ralph and on occasion assigned stories to him. The two men soon developed more than just a working relationship. The Division of Communication sometimes flew Ralph to Toronto for meetings. On those occasions Ralph and Jim usually met, had lunch, and discussed their mutual concerns. They discovered

that they shared a wealth of common experience and understanding: both had had childhood experiences of being outcasts and strangers, Ralph within the Mennonite community in Manitoba, Jim as a "missionary's kid" in India; both had experienced life from the perspective of a different culture, although at different ages; in their professional careers, both had rejected the consumer mentality which drove the secular commercial media; both had developed a passion for and ability to communicate with the spoken and written word. This abundance of shared experience formed the basis of a growing friendship. At the time, neither one dreamed where that friendship would lead.

■ THE GIFT OF STORY

Ralph turned his attention to research he had done on storytelling during a study leave. Like any good student of the time, he had kept his notes on 3x 5 inch file cards.

Before long they covered the Ping-Pong table. Ralph arranged and rearranged them, trying to bring some order to his ideas. The more he worked at it, the more convinced he became that he had created the basis for a book. So it was that *The Gift of Story* came to be, at least as a manuscript. Many miles and many months lay between that manuscript and the book it would become. In her search for full-time work, Bev had accepted a call to become minister at the United Church in Winfield, B.C. As Ralph and Bev prepared for the move, Ralph bundled up his manuscript and sent it off to G. R. Welch Publishing in Burlington, Ontario. Shortly after they arrived in Winfield, Ralph got a letter of acceptance from Welch. But a year later, nothing had happened. A trip to Toronto for other business provided an opportunity to go to Burlington, a half hour drive from Toronto. Ralph was stunned by the news which greeted him upon his arrival. Welch had implemented a new acquisitions policy. They wanted \$3,000 up front. To Ralph this sounded like vanity publishing. He also questioned whether there was a genuine need for the money.

Ralph returned to Toronto in a daze. He promptly sought out those who had encouraged him the most: Frank Brisbin, Al Forrest, and Jim Taylor. Ralph explained what had happened. It didn't take long for a consensus to emerge: "Why not publish it yourself?" Ralph returned to Winfield with a great manuscript, some good advice, and very little idea of what to do next. As fate would have it, a solution soon presented itself. Ralph had been writing a humor column for the local newspaper, exploring his interest in the way humor functions in society. The editor of the newspaper, Jack McCarthy, was a second cousin to Ralph. The two men struck a deal, Ralph would write his column without payment. In return, Jack would let him use the newspaper's typesetting equipment in the evenings. Ralph called on a number of women from St. Paul's United Church in Kelowna and asked them to proofread what he had set. The proofreading itself was done, Ralph says wryly, "not on the basis of any expertise but in the hope that if enough people read it enough times, they would catch most of the errors."

Top: Staff Retreat 1989 at Silver Star Resort:
 Back row left to right – unknown, Tim Faller, Carol Jeffs, Rhonda Pigott, Brenda Allingham, Kari Milton, Lindy Jones.
 Second row left to right – Jim Taylor, Marilyn Perry, Lynn Chilton, Lois Huey Heck, Cynthia Boldt, Pat Unit, Margaret Kyle.
 Front row left to right – Ralph Milton, Norah Kerr and Bonnie Schlosser.



Bottom Left: Staff Retreat – Naramata Centre 1996
 Gordon Timbers, Julie Bachewich, Brenda Allingham, Patty Berube, Cheryl Perry, Pat Uniat, Tom Cockrell, Margaret Kyle, Leslie Stockton, Lois Huey Heck, Crystal Przybille, Rhonda Pigott, Gene Longson, Cathy Williams, Dianne Hutchinson, Annemarie Morrison, Bonnie Schlosser, Stu Ritchie, Alan Whitmore, unknown, Lynne Chilton, Joanne Greenhough, Denise Soulodre, Mike Schwartzentruber, Keith Royston, Rocia Lopez-Bretzloff and Ron Ritcho.



Bottom Right: David Cleary





Top: Staff in 2010
 Back row left to right -
 Kathy Carlisle, Cynthia Boldt,
 Glenda MacDonald, Ron
 Richot, April Good, Lynette
 Nicholas. Middle row –
 Sharon Adams , Lynne
 Chilton, Verena Velten, Patty
 Berurbe, Joanna Shaw, Mike
 Schwartzentruber.
 Front row – Debbie Joyal
 MacDonald, Julie Bachewich,
 Barb Stephen, Chaunda
 Daigneault.



**Bottom: Colouring Book
 Contest Family Story Bible**
 Back row left to right -
 Sharon Adams, Ellen
 Turnbull, Barb Stephen, Kathy
 Carlise, Cyrus Gandvia, Julie
 Bachewich, Brenda
 Allingham.
 Front row left to right - Mike
 Schwartzentruber, Lynette
 Nicholas, Kailee Fergie.

■ IN NEED OF A NAME

As Ralph prepared to send *The Gift of Story* to the printers, he realized that he, as publisher, needed a name. Minutes from his house in Winfield lay a beautiful little body of water called Wood Lake. He liked the name and so decided to claim it for his publishing venture. He would be “Wood Lake Communications.” It had a nice ring to it. Not only that, it sounded wonderfully pretentious which, given the fact that he was a publishing house of one, appealed to his sense of humour. Despite its errors and a ho-hum cover, *The Gift of Story* appeared in 1980 and sold well.

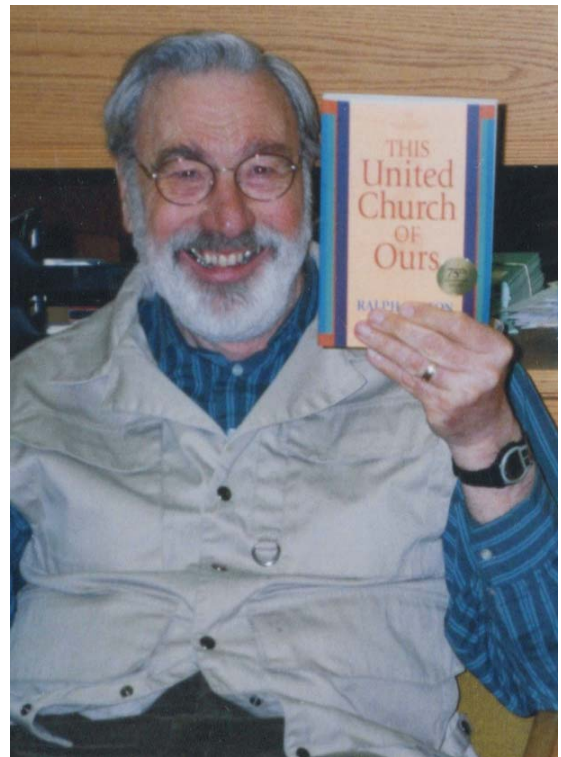
For a number of years, Jim had been writing for a column called “Words to Live By” which the United Church distributed to weekly newspapers across the country. By 1980 he had written several hundred of these. He too begun to think that he had the materials for a pretty good book. He bundled his columns together and handed them over to the people at the Canadian Ecumenical Publishing House (CANEC). CANEC sent bits of Jim’s work to various people, most of whom said it was good stuff but unpublishable. Back in Winfield, Ralph chaired a committee organizing an area-wide Pentecost event. At Ralph’s suggestion, the committee invited Jim as a feature speaker. Jim’s address examined ways in which we discover the presence of God in the experiences of our daily lives. Jim took his bundle of articles along to show Ralph. Ralph agreed that they had the potential to be a very good book, but thought they were disorganized. “Give them some structure,” he said, “and I’ll publish them for you.” It occurred to Jim that his Pentecost address might provide a structure for organizing his columns. He went home, reworked his material, and approached Ralph again. Neither Jim nor Ralph is quite sure what happened next. Jim recalls giving Ralph \$2,000, about half the amount that Ralph had spent publishing *A Gift of Story*. This gave them enough funds to publish Jim’s book, *An Everyday God*. Unintentionally, hardly realizing it, they had become partners.

■ CHANGES

No sooner did they become partners, than Jim wanted to make some changes. Specifically, he had a problem with this name thing - Wood Lake Communications. The Wood Lake part of it sounded good, but they were publishers. They should have a good publisher kind of name, something like ... Wood Lake Press. Why not? The two men were obviously finding it difficult to take themselves seriously. That soon changed. Jim’s book came out on Sunday, March 31, 1981. That morning, he sold 150 copies at Parkwoods United Church, his home congregation in Toronto. The book continued to sell out through several printings. Later that year, The Upper Room in the United States approached Wood Lake about co-publishing *An Everyday God* for the American market. The idea appealed to Jim and Ralph because it gave the book U.S. distribution: “It was a chance to reverse the flow of information. Usually, Canadian churches have to cope with American materials. It was our chance to send some good stuff south of the border as sort of a gift from Canada to the American churches.”

■ INCREASING THE COMMITMENT

At the same time, Jim decided to leave his job at *The United Church Observer*. Al Forrest had died suddenly at the end of 1978. Jim had applied for the job of Editor, but the United Church chose another candidate. By 1981, Jim realized that staying on had been a mistake. He was frustrated and unhappy, and so he resigned.



Above: Ralph Milton author of *This United Church of Ours* – 4 editions



Above: A stack of the first books published with *The Gift of Story* being the first.

Initially, neither he nor Ralph expected the business of Wood Lake to occupy more than one or two evenings a week. They planned to earn their living in other ways, and publish a couple of books a year in their spare time. The success of their first two books changed their impression of Wood Lake's potential. Yet with only two books to its credit, Wood Lake certainly wasn't going to be a source of either full-time work or salary.

■ THIS UNITED CHURCH OF OURS

Upon completion of *The Gift of Story*, Ralph began his second book. *This United Church of Ours* was a sympathetic look at the United Church of Canada from the inside: what it was, what it said and did, what it believed, how it ran. In the process of writing the book, Ralph and Wood Lake developed an operational style that became a central feature of Wood Lake's most successful ventures: "Consult as broadly as possible, but keep the number of decision-makers to a bare minimum."

In 1980, Lois Huey Heck had read *The Gift of Story*. She had been so impressed that she wrote her first and only "dear author" letter. Ralph replied saying that the book had been so well received that he was starting his own publishing company. Lois wrote back saying she

was a struggling graphic arts major: "If you ever need an illustrator for a book, maybe you could keep me in mind." Ralph did. A year later, when it came time to think about how to illustrate his new book, Ralph thought of Lois. Ralph asked her to illustrate *This United Church of Ours*. He didn't have any money to pay her, and Lois, in an altruistic mood, said she didn't want any. She just wanted the chance to do the project.

The book itself was a runaway best seller from the word go.

■ LIKE A MIGHTY RIVER

When Lois Wilson, who was then Moderator of the United Church, saw Jim's book she said, "That's the way a book should be done. That's what I want my book to look like," and promptly handed Jim a great stack of essays. At the same time, Bev had invited Lois to come and speak to the Winfield congregation. When Lois arrived, she handed a copy of the same stack to Ralph. *Like A Mighty River* gave Wood Lake its third consecutive best seller. And like *An Everyday God*, it too became a Canadian gift to American churches. Friendship Press recognized the book's worth and distributed it throughout the United States, where it eventually sold almost as many copies as it had in Canada.

Despite its youthful awkwardness Wood Lake initially seemed to thrive. On the surface this was surprising. Wood Lake had begun because one person, and then another, had written a book which they couldn't get published. And so, they published the books themselves. The efforts of most people who write books and then undertake the job of publishing and distributing those books themselves usually meet disaster. Both Ralph and Jim believed that what they were writing was something the church needed to have and to hear. In that sense they were embarking upon a ministry.

■ FIRST BOOKS AND FIRST PRINCIPLES

Ralph Milton's *The Gift of Story* was indeed the beginning of a much larger gift of story to the church. It was the gift of a vehicle which enabled people with a story to

Top left: Bev & Ralph Milton at WPoG Celebration



Top right: Joan & Jim Taylor at WPoG Celebration



Middle: Donald Schmidt, Susan Burt, Marilyn Perry, Donna Scorer, Gordon Timbers, and Meg Jordan at WPoG Celebration



Bottom left: Tim Scorer and Ralph Milton

Bottom right: Tony Nancarrow





Left top: WPOG Celebration
Marilyn Perry – Editor, Bonnie
Schlosser – Publisher WL,
Gordon Timbers – Editor



Left bottom: International
Partners Pete Velander
(Logos), Tony Nancarrow
(Mediacom), and Bonnie
Schlosser (Wood Lake)

Right top: Renna Knoff



Right middle: Norra Kerr



Right bottom: Heidi Schlosser



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tell, to tell it. Of the stories that Wood Lake would tell, most grew out of a conviction that God could be found most clearly, not in some dusty theological tome, but in the kind of everyday life experiences that we all share. Jim Taylor's *An Everyday God* was, in that sense, a statement of first principles. In some sense, *This United Church of Ours* applied that principle of seeking the activity of God in daily life to a whole denomination. It applied an awareness of the need for self-understanding and insight into faith on a corporate scale. Now in its fourth edition and umpteenth printing, it remains Wood Lake's best-selling book.

On an individual level, Lois Wilson also sought self-understanding and the activity of God in her daily life. Her book, *Like A Mighty River*, represented a profound sharing of her life and faith experience. At the core of that experience, she discovered the unceasing and relentlessly creative activity of God, activity which speaks to all human experience the language of just and compassionate living. Wood Lake would struggle hard to make that language its mother tongue. Wood Lake had indeed become a ministry. But whether or not the young company could itself continue to roll on like a mighty river remained to be seen.

■ A NAME CHANGE

Although the future looked bright, Jim and Ralph realized that should Wood Lake ever fold, they could lose everything – cars, houses, kids. To protect themselves against that possibility, they decided to incorporate.

At the same time they incorporated, they again changed the name of the company. Despite its lofty associations, the term “Press” confused many people, Wood Lake Press didn't own a press. And so, Wood Lake Press became Wood Lake Books.

As Wood Lake's operations expanded after 1984, so did the number of staff. The office itself remained in Ralph's basement, creeping slowly outward from what had been just the family room until it occupied the entire basement- except the laundry tubs. By the time the tidal wave hit in April of 1987, Wood Lake had hired several people to help with specific functions

- Norah Kerr worked part time as Wood Lake's proofreader.
- Bonnie Schlosser was doing the financial book-keeping.
- Bonnie's sister, Lynne Chilton, joined the staff as a secretary.
- Kari Milton, Ralph's and Bev's daughter, became Wood Lake's first full-time employee in the spring of 1985.
- Margaret Vouladakis got called in to help out while one of the computers was down and never left.

Yet despite the activity and apparent growth, Wood Lake Books continued to teeter on the edge of a financial abyss. For Wood Lake, that sense of leaning further and further towards the abyss continued, even during the initial stages of its greatest growth.

■ SONGS FOR A GOSPEL PEOPLE

During the first year or two of its existence, Wood Lake Books had conducted a survey asking if the church needed a hymn book of contemporary music. The answer was an overwhelming yes.

In the summer of 1983, Ralph traveled to Vancouver to attend the assembly of the World Council of Churches as part of the reporting team for The United Church Observer. While there, he was introduced to Gerald Hobbs, Professor of Church History at the Vancouver School of Theology (VST). Ralph had heard that Gerald was interested in working on some kind of new hymnal. The two men soon found themselves discussing hymn books. It troubled Gerald that by the end of the 1970s, very few people in the congregation he



Above: WPoG Celebration
Donna Scorer (writer &
Editor) and Bonnie Schlosser



Above: Marilyn Perry - Editor of WPoG

attended sang. Yet both the Presbyterian tradition and the Methodist tradition within the United Church had very deep roots in congregational singing. Gerald took it as a challenge: “My journey led me to conclude that the red Hymn Book was not serving the church well. I was also concerned about the issue of inclusive language. The church passed all sorts of statements urging its use and yet little progress seemed to be made in the local congregations.” Gerald really wanted to have two hymn books: a heritage book that could be hard bound because it wouldn’t be changed that frequently, and a supplementary loose-leaf book that could accommodate changes in language and the addition of new material. From the very beginning, the church community showed great interest in the project. Material began

pouring in to Gerald’s office. There were organized workshops which encouraged people to make lists of songs that they would like to have. They then forwarded those suggestions to Gerald. A call for new Canadian hymns brought 3,000 submissions alone. Among those 3,000, hundreds were hymn texts set to three favourite tunes: *How Great Thou Art*, *Amazing Grace*, and *Cwm Rhondda*. “We could save the church a lot of problems,” someone on the committee suggested, “by simply publishing a couple of hundred texts, all set to one tune. Then no congregation could ever complain about not knowing the melody!”

■ PARTNER CONGREGATIONS

Another kind of community involvement generated even more interest in the project. Wood Lake had put \$10,000 into the kitty and small amounts came from several foundations. But it soon became evident that costs would far outrun the available money; this hymn book supplement might well be the last thing Wood Lake Books would undertake.

The group struck on the idea of finding partner congregations. Congregations could buy into the project

by paying \$1 in advance for every copy of the book they wanted to purchase. In return, they would get one-third off the sale price of the books when they came out.

By late summer they already had 10,000 advance orders.

In October, advance orders had reached 90,000. When it came time to place the print order, Wood Lake requested an incredible 165,000 copies. Until that point, most Wood Lake books had had an initial print run of between 2,000 and 3,000 copies. What would 165,000 hymn books even look like? Nobody really knew. As it turned out, 165,000 books looked an awful lot like the large, semi-trailer truck, that pulled up in front of the Miltons’ house sometime later.

While *Songs for a Gospel People* represented an explosion of money, work, and excitement, it was also only the first blast.

■ WHOLE PEOPLE OF GOD

All across Canada, people had begun hearing about a new Sunday school curriculum.

During one of their early visits to Novalis, Gilbert LaCasse scared the life out of Jim and Ralph. “To survive as a religious publisher,” he said, “you simply must have a church school curriculum.” The two had little idea of how to even think about such a project, let alone how to create one. Depending on one’s view of these things, you could say that what happened next was either the result of blind chance, or divine intervention. Ralph returned to Winfield to discover a message on his desk from Marilyn Perry. Marilyn, he learned, had been asked to approach Wood Lake on behalf of a group in Regina, Saskatchewan. The group had a Sunday school curriculum they wanted published.

■ MARILYN PERRY

In 1979 Marilyn Perry began working at St. John’s United Church in Regina as their part-time Christian Education person. St. John’s was her first paid Christian education position. As she had always, she approached the job with the utmost seriousness. It frustrated her that

some resources, such as the United Church's Core Curriculum, were already two decades old and badly out of date. The newest resource, *Loaves and Fishes*, was full of great ideas but was not an organized curriculum. Still others were too American. The wife of the minister at St. John's, Dorothy Logan, had had previous experience writing for *Wow and Surprise*, Sunday school papers that were used in the primary and junior segments of the Core Curriculum. She and Marilyn began writing their own curriculum materials. They worked in this way for a year and a half. Soon, a group of women had come together to continue writing curriculum.

■ CREATING A NEW CURRICULUM

One of the ministers in the presbytery, Don Faris, approached the group. "Right now the curricula out there are not satisfying anyone," he told them. "The thriving Sunday schools are the ones who can afford a CE worker who writes curriculum for them. It's not fair. It's not fair that churches have to be big enough and have enough money to hire someone to do CE. I think you should really be doing this for all the churches in the Regina area."

The curriculum needed to address the group's major concerns:

- It must integrate worship and Christian education.
- It must be biblically based. Children, not to mention adults, no longer had a solid grasp of the Bible.
- It must use inclusive language.
- It should be colorful and inexpensive. (They soon learned that 'colorful and "inexpensive" are mutually exclusive terms.)
- It should include a resource for parents, so they know what their children are learning and can reinforce it in the home.

As good as all these ideas sounded, no one had a clear idea of how to integrate the various elements structurally. Except Don. "We could base the whole thing on the lectionary," he suggested. "That would make it biblical, and also allow the integration we want between Sunday school and what's happening in church." The group was skeptical. Some had already looked at the lectionary and decided that it represented a worship structure, not an

educational structure. The four passages given for any one Sunday often seemed to have little to do with one another. How in the world would they unify them intellectually, let alone in a presentation geared for children? And yet, no one could come up with any other structure that achieved the same integration. They agreed to try it.



■ THE BRAIN STORMING

Two people from each of the 25 participating churches in the presbytery met as a brainstorming group. They tried to discern what the lectionary passages for each Sunday said to

them in their own lives. Then they thought about what those same passages might say to children of various ages. This sharing of ideas and experiences brought the passages to life. Themes leapt off the page. The faith questions, and how children could relate to them, became obvious. The brainstorming group also shared ideas for resources, activities, and hymns.



Top: Marilyn Perry & Gordon Timbers – editors of WPOG & Seasons of the Spirit

Bottom: Seasons of the Spirit Writers: Donald Schmidt, Lori Rosenkvist, Sid Fowler, Martha Gilliss, Susan Burt

■ WRITING

After the brainstorming group met, the writer's group, now about ten people, took the accumulated materials and insights and developed refined lesson plans. They repeated the process week after week, unit after unit. One of the benefits the writers discovered, and one of the insights of the original planners, was that because they worked with so little lead time, they could make the curriculum incredibly current, with examples taken virtually from the previous day's news.



Above: Cheryl Perry with WPoG puppet - Charlie the Church Mouse. WPoG Writer Retreat at Naramata Centre 2000



Right: WPoG Writers Retreat 1989 at Silver Star Resort
 Back row left to right – Doris Dyke, Donna Scorer, Donald Schmidt, Patricia Bays.
 Third row left to right – Unknown, Unknown, Norma Laing (Goughner), Cheryl Perry.
 Second row left to right – Marilyn Perry, Jean Kimamura, Jane ?.
 Front row left to right – Tim Scorer, Peggy Evans, unknown.

■ A GIFT OF COMMUNITY, TO COMMUNITY

In a very real sense, the curriculum became a gift of community, to community. That first year involved the efforts of close to 2,000 people: 50 “brainstormers,” 10 writers, 100 people for the PPP Days, 75 teacher trainers, 222 local church teachers, and 1536 children.

That uniqueness created interest beyond Regina Presbytery. Others wanted to use it. The Regina group, however, felt over-extended already. They simply didn’t have the energy or resources to go national. Their premonition proved true. During the second year, people began to tire. By the third year, they were burned out and barely able to cross the “finish line.” And yet interest from outside Regina remained keen. People wanted this new curriculum. As they began their third year, the Regina group approached the national church in the hope that it would take the project over. “If you could get a publisher like Wood Lake Books to do it.”

They suggested, “then that’s what you need to do.” Marilyn Perry had moved to Naramata, British Columbia, a year and a half into the Regina project. Even so, the Regina group had adopted her as a “lifetime” member and continued to send her the materials. Having (48) been turned away by the national offices of the United Church the Regina group turned to Marilyn. “Could you approach Ralph Milton and Wood Lake Books on our behalf?” they asked. Marilyn called Ralph. Ralph could barely believe his ears.

■ WPOG COMES TO WINFIELD

When the material arrived, Ralph and Bev went through it. It was good stuff, really good stuff. And it needed a lot of work. Ralph believed in the project but didn’t have any money. Wood Lake could only do the curriculum, he said, if Marilyn agreed to edit it. She agreed, but there were still other matters to work out. Distributing a curriculum nationally was more complex than producing and distributing it locally.

■ GRANT REQUESTED AND RECEIVED

In the meantime, Ralph put together a strictly commercial proposal to the Department of Communications of the federal government. He pointed out that most Canadian church money spent on curriculum materials went south of the border. He also claimed, somewhat brazenly perhaps, that Wood Lake could sell the curriculum to 200 congregations the first year, 500 the second year, and 1,000 the third year. After that, perhaps other denominations would pick it up. Ralph asked for \$70,000. To his utter surprise, he got the entire amount.

■ CURRICULUM TAKES OFF

Originally, Wood Lake placed an order with the local printer for 200 copies. By the beginning of August, they had already received 600 orders, and the number kept climbing. For the first time, they had a sense of being involved in something big, something important. They

Left top and bottom: Staff Retreat Fun & Games: Margaret Kyle and Patty Berube rocking the hula hoop competition - you go girls!



Right top: Jim Taylor's Retirement Party Joanne Greenhough, Lynne Chilton, Debbie Joyal MacDonald, Bonnie Schlosser, Brenda Allingham, Patty Berube.



Right bottom: Halloween - Erin Steele, Patty Berube, Barb Stephens & Debbie Joyal MacDonald



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Top left: Staff Retreat – yet another skit! Cynthia Boldt (as Jim Taylor), Lindy Jones (as Bonnie Schlosser, Lois Huey Heck (as Ralph Milton)

Top right: Christmas Luncheon: Santa, Cathy Williams, Crystal Przybille, Anna Voladakis, Ross Davies.



Bottom: Halloween at Wood Lake – one of many parties! Back row left to right – Rocio Lopez-Bretzlaff, Gene Longson, Margaret Kyle, Dianne Hutchinson, Anmarie Morrison. Front row left to right – Stu Ritchie(Zac) and Mike Schwartzentruber.

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felt they had helped to give the church something it really needed and wanted. The high of that experience carried over into their work on the curriculum and into their continuing sense of ministry.

Orders continued to pour into the Winfield office. The initial print run was 850 sets of the curriculum. But the telephones kept ringing. Wood Lake spent much of the fall reprinting. They sold out in September (53) and again in November. By the time they finished, they had mailed out 1,000 sets of the curriculum. In other words, before the first year had ended, they had virtually reached their three-year goal.

Undeniably, the Whole People of God contained a sort of magic, and even the most modest expectations of how well the curriculum might do in its first year were significantly off. The group would have celebrated jubilantly if 200 congregations signed on in that first year. They quadrupled that, and the numbers skyrocketed from there. At one point it was used by congregations around the world including in the UK, South Korea, Denmark and Morocco; at least one church on every continent (other than Antarctica) used the curriculum.

Although Marilyn was indeed surprised at how rapidly the curriculum took off, she didn't dwell. Rather, she once again rolled up her sleeves, working hard to ensure the curriculum was suited to all those who paid to use it. Marilyn stayed on as editor for 10 years with Wood Lake, driven by deep desires to both ensure it continued to meet the needs of a spectrum of congregations, and that it continued to breathe as a moving, living thing that would serve all children who engage with it.

■ FUN AND RELEVANT

When asked about why the curriculum still worked some 35 years later, Marilyn stated that the answer lay both in its simplicity and the lectionary upon which it is based. "You start with something about [people's] own life experience, and you show how the Biblical story can relate to that experience," said Marilyn.

"It was obviously the dream that the parents in church listening to the sermon would have heard the same passages read, then their kid comes home with a picture

of Moses and the 10 commandments, and they're like, 'right. We just heard that story too, so we could have that conversation said Marilyn's daughter Cheryl. "The Whole People of God isn't a flashy-looking curriculum, its substance surpasses its counterparts. You look at other curriculums out there, they're colourful, they're slick, they're super expensive, their theology is rather horrible." For Marilyn, it is what it has always been, alongside so much more.

■ GOING INTERNATIONAL

The process of the curriculum going global may be thanks to the fact that marketing was never Marilyn's forte. Several United Church of Christ congregations in Wisconsin heard about the early work the Regina group was doing and called to see if they could get a copy of the curriculum. Marilyn dissuaded them by saying it was too Canadian – they probably wouldn't like it! However, when other US churches inquired it was decided by Wood Lake that they would sell it to them, but would also add a small handbook to help them understand some of the unique features of Canadian spelling, and to provide additional lessons for the Sunday preceding Canadian Thanksgiving. At this point, Donald Schmidt – a Canadian who was living in the US and who had ordered the curriculum for his church – came on board to edit the handbook and help bridge the intricacies of the border.

Ralph meanwhile, en route home from a visit to Toronto, stopped in Minnesota to meet with folks at Logos Productions, a small publishing company in the Twin Cities that produced children's worship bulletins.



Top: Pete Velander & Tony Nancarrow – our friends and partners from Logos and Mediacom.

Bottom: Tony Nancarrow & Ian Price – Mediacom, Australia.



While Ralph was interested in those, Pete Velander at Logos was interested in the curriculum that Wood Lake produced. Before long it was being published in the



Top: Toronto Office Staff - Carol Jeffs, Tim Faller & Jim Taylor

Above: Ralph – Celebrating Novalis & Wood Lakes joint distribution venture.

US as well as Canada, and Donald Schmidt became a Logos employee editing the US edition. Before long The Whole People of God had not only gone international, it went overseas. Logos already had a working relationship with Tony Nancarrow and MediaCom, a nonprofit ecumenical communications agency based in Australia. Pete passed along The Whole People of God to Tony. Wood Lake soon had an Australian publisher and distributor. They also licensed

the Whole People of God to Resource Publications in California who adapted it for use in the Roman Catholic church, producing a resource called “Celebrating the Lectionary.”

Wood Lake’s relationships with Logos and MediaCom continued to grow. Initially, the main thing the three organizations had in common was The Whole People of God. In two years, it became the largest part of the Logos operation, and the same was true for MediaCom.

■ GROWING AND LEARNING

As the curriculum grew, so did the Winfield office. When the curriculum arrived in the spring of 1987, Wood Lake Books consisted of Ralph and five regular staff holding both part-time and full-time positions. By the end of 1988, the number of full- and part-time staff had more than doubled with the addition of Lois Huey-Heck, Jessie Finch, Rhonda Pigott, Lindy Jones, Pat Uniat, Cynthia Williamson and Brenda Allingham. In 1989, six more staff joined: Danielle Witty, Barb Kailuweit, Leslie Stockton, Renna Knopf, Debbie Joyal and Ron Ritchot. In 1991, another five: David Cleary, Patty Berubé, Stu Ritchie, Julie Bachewich, and Jan Chapman.

In that same four-year period the office moved twice.

The first move liberated Wood Lake from Ralph’s basement, or Ralph’s basement from Wood Lake, depending on your perspective. Wood Lake rented a vacant store in a Winfield shopping mall. The second move was to a Jehovah’s Witness hall which Wood Lake purchased and renovated. In fact, the company grew so quickly that no sooner was one set of renovations completed than the necessity for further renovations reared its head. In reality, it took the Wood Lake Winfield office four years to recover from the success of the curriculum and to regain some sense of equilibrium, or at least controlled growth. A second editor, Meg Jordan, was also hired to help produce the curriculum as the job had become quite unwieldy for Marilyn.

■ NOVALIS

Wood Lake’s association with Novalis sprang, like so many other things, from a coincidental coming together of people and purposes. Novalis and Wood Lake agreed to split the country, and their efforts. Novalis would distribute the entire Wood Lake line in the east, with the exception of the United Church Bookrooms. Wood Lake would distribute the Novalis line in the west. Wood Lake’s connection with Novalis began in 1985 and developed over a period of five or six years. It represented an increasing ground swell of activity.

■ THE TORONTO OFFICE

Ralph used to say that Wood Lake was the only company around that had its international headquarters in Winfield, BC, with a sub-office in Toronto. The Toronto office, which was originally just Jim Taylor, never grew like the Winfield office, but it did grow. Even before the curriculum, Jim had begun to experience an increase in his workload. Publishing often felt like a great weight hanging from his shoulders. He and Ralph had committed themselves to more books and more authors than ever before; he still had a variety of freelance projects and clients. As well he had continued to write, producing two more books: *Two Worlds in One* and *Last Chance*.

■ THE END OF AN ERA

In the summer of 1993, Jim and Joan Taylor packed their belongings and headed west to Winfield. They took with them the 25 years of life experience accumulated in their Toronto home. At the same time, they turned the page on a significant part of the Wood Lake story. When Jim left, the Toronto office closed. Although Wood Lake offered to move its entire Toronto staff to Winfield, the realities of family life led each of two of the three – Carol Jeffs and Tim Faller – to a decision to remain in Toronto. Only Michael Schwartztruber made the move and so joined Jim and the rest of the staff in Winfield.

The long-distance relationship between Toronto and Winfield, between Jim and Ralph, functioned as a fairly natural extension of who Jim is as a person – of his need to belong yet remain separate. With his arrival in Winfield, the company continued to grow, and it was becoming a well-oiled machine. Jim and Ralph had more success than they ever imagined, the little business that started on Ralph's Ping-Pong table was becoming more self-sufficient. Jim and Ralph both decided to retire, and with that, they sold the company to the employees at the company still working at the end of 1993.

The team eventually outgrew their offices in the renovated Jehovah's Witness building. Wood Lake moved once again in 1997 into new offices in the Hiram Walker building.

■ MUSIC LICENSING

Ralph had been investigating music licensing programs for some years, but held back when he learned that several denominations were in the process of developing their own hymn books. He didn't want Wood Lake to be seen as competing with denominational efforts. However, a number of people involved in hymn book committees challenged Ralph's assumption that a music licensing venture might be considered competitive. When Ralph discussed the matter with the national committee developing the new United Church hymn book, for example, the committee reassured him: "We'll only be able to put a few hundred hymns in this book. There are a lot of other hymns congregations should

have access to as well. Besides, people won't stop writing good hymns just because someone has published a hymn book."

In the music licensing project, Wood Lake negotiated an agreement with a wide range of music copyright holders. Wood Lake then licensed congregations to use as much of the music covered under the agreement as they wanted. The music licensing project was administered by The Hub for Wood Lake, Logos, and MediaCom. Wood Lake sold their piece of the partnership in 2005.

■ BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

There's an increasing recognition that the North American educational system – yes, and church programs too – have dismally failed to transmit the Christian faith, It's become a cliché to say that today's churchgoers are biblically illiterate. Walter Farquharson, the former moderator of The United Church of Canada, says we're kidding ourselves when we talk as if just one generation were affected. He suggests that we have two or three generations who don't know the Bible. And each succeeding generation feels less and less confident dealing with the Bible. Lois Wilson, author of *Like a Mighty River*, described the misunderstandings that today's children have. One Sunday school teacher asked her class what Good Friday was. "That's when Jesus died," said one of the brighter children. "And why did he die?" she pursued. "Because he ate the poisoned apple!" came the answer. Lois' response was to write a new book, *Miriam, Mary, and Me*. But it is more than a book of children's stories; it includes serious commentary to help parents come to grips with the meaning and significance of the stories. Since then, Wood Lake has published a number of children's books, including several children's bibles.

■ BIBLES FOR CHILDREN

The Family Story Bible meets the expectations of today's values-oriented parents by using inclusive language for God, and including stories of both men and women in the Bible. Readers will find old favourite stories and



Top: Alan Whitmore – gifted with an ear for music.

Above: Alan Whitmore – Canadian Christian Festival – Hamilton, Ontario 1994

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Top: *Family Story Bible* Author
Ralph Milton & Illustrator
Margaret Kyle



Above: *Read Wonder Listen*
Bible Stories author Laura
Alary

they'll discover stories often overlooked in children's Bibles, such as the stories of the prophets, wisdom literature, and the letters of the early church.

Based on the bestselling *Family Story Bible*, the *Lectionary Story Bible* includes many new and wonderfully engaging stories from both the Hebrew and New Testament scriptures. At least one, but usually two stories from the lections are included for each Sunday of the church year making the *Lectionary Story Bible* a complete lectionary resource for Christian educators, camp leaders, worship leaders, and families who want to share their faith at home.

Laura Alary combines her gift for telling the biblical stories with historical research, contemporary concerns about language, and a compassionate and inclusive theology making *Read, Wonder, Listen*, a perfect children's Bible for progressive Christians.

Award winning *Read, Wonder, Listen* helps children, and the adults who love them, ask the big questions of life – the same questions asked by the people in the Bible: Who are we? Where do we belong? What are we supposed to do and who are we supposed to be? Where is God? How does God want us to live? “The reason these stories have lasted so long,” writes Alary, “the reason they were collected and saved so carefully, is because people have always found in them something precious. Something that speaks to people of all times and places. All of these stories are about the great Mystery we call God. They tell of people who met God, wondered about God, waited for God, and were surprised by God.”

■ CHANGING IMPRINTS

In 1996, Wood Lake Publishing established its Northstone imprint as a way to broaden the scope of its content and extend its readership beyond its primarily church-based audience. The Northstone imprint celebrates the meeting of spirituality and “real life” with books about parenting and sexuality, stress and spirituality, health and well-being.

As Wood Lake Books grew in and of itself, Northstone became Pine Valley Publishing, which was a service provided to authors who wished to self-publish their books. It provided light editing and marketing resources, and in return, the author paid for a more significant cost of the publishing. It was shut down in 2021.

Inspired by Marcus Borg's book *The Heart of Christianity*, Bonnie Schlosser (Wood Lake's publisher/president at the time) and Lois Huey-Heck (then associate publisher) decided to start a new imprint to very specifically promote the theology of the “emerging Christian paradigm,” as defined by Borg. Whereas the traditional paradigm had been “belief-centred” – and in places that still seems to be what matters most – Borg argued that a “transformation-centred” paradigm was rising organically, and that this “way” represents the true “heart” of Christianity.

Taking all of this and his larger thesis on board, CopperHouse titles would interpret the Bible from a historical and metaphorical perspective that emphasizes the “more-than-literal” meanings of the texts take an appreciative, discerning, and integrative approach to modern learnings and science (including in the areas of history, psychology, sociology, culture, anthropology, comparative religions, as well as in the physical sciences and cosmology) honour the perennial wisdom contained in the world's major religious traditions (not just Christianity) focus more on transformation than on belief

Like the Northstone imprint, the CopperHouse imprint and perspective has now been folded or integrated back into the larger Wood Lake Publishing imprint and ethos. Rather than use the language of “emerging Christianity,” however, Wood Lake now identifies itself as representative of “progressive Christianity,” and it is this aspect that seems to resonant most strongly with its readers today.

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■ SEASONS OF THE SPIRIT

It began with a question, “Can independent and denominational publishers collaborate?” The response? A resounding “yes!” Several projects merged, the largest being a yet to be designed and named lectionary-based resource. The meetings that followed were exciting, imaginative, and challenging. Those involved in the discussion along the way included:

- Anglican Church in Canada
- American Baptist Churches
- Christian Board of Publication
- Cumberland Presbyterian Church
- Living the Good News (curriculum)
- Logos Productions Inc.
- MediaCom Education Inc
- Presbyterian Church in Canada
- Presbyterian Church (USA)
- Reformed Church in America
- Resource Publications Inc.
- United Church of Christ
- United Church of Canada
- United Methodist Publishing House
- Uniting Church in Australia
- Wood Lake Books

(From Seasons of the Spirit *Theological and Educational Foundations (TEF) Paper*)

The group, in various shapes and forms, met in various places in Canada, USA and Australia. Using *Discerning God’s Will Together* (Morris and Olsen) as a guide, the group adopted a discernment process for decision making and product development. The management model was discerned from this process, and the Theological and Educational Foundation Paper was developed and written.

The first edition of the TEF read, “Our goal is to develop sound theological and educational resources that build on learnings from the past and create a new future.”

As discussions progressed, some withdrew but still supported the work. As discussions moved into the concrete product, there were five stakeholders: Logos Productions, MediaCom, United Church Press (UCC), United Methodist Publishing, and Wood Lake Books. Each company had a rep on each of the “management

teams.” Editorial consisted of Lori Rosenkvist, Susan Burt, Gordon Timbers (who had replaced Marilyn Perry as editor when she retired), Sid Fowler, and Martha Gilliss. This team set about designing the format of the new resource. The launch date of this new product was in time for the season of Pentecost 2 of 2002 and it has been running ever since. The excitement, challenge, and imaginative way forward has continued from those first heady days.

There were 35 writers, editors, resource people at the first writer event in San Francisco. Two teams in two rooms writing two full seasons of material.

In the beginning, there were four events a year: a development event, an arts event (such a gift and a lovely time of feeding our souls), and two writer events. We have seen many changes as we have sought to learn from the past and create a new future. Moving to three events a year, with one team only meeting at each writer event and 30 new sessions written a year – the remainder re-edited from other years. Nine writers became five, the editorial team shrunk, yet Seasons of the Spirit continued to improve, remain strong, theologically sound, and responsive to the grassroots. With grateful thanks to the commitment and integrity of the editorial team – in its many forms.

The work and story have shaped and is shaping Fusion and Encore into the future. This is not the end of Seasons; it continues with opportunity for participation, but with a new development model and a new product. Some of the current editorial group will move into other curriculum work, others into congregational life. Some will contribute in some shape or form to Fusion or Encore.



Top: Susan Burt – Editor of Seasons of the Spirit

Above: Cathie Talbot – Writer for Seasons of the Spirit



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Seasons of the Spirit will continue to learn from the past while creating a new future. Over 100 people have served on the editing and writing team alone, plus prepress and production, customer service, and marketing, and finance.

CHANGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In 2005, the company made yet another office move, to the SRI office building in Winfield. In July of 2009, the employees transferred their ownership of Wood Lake to a new not-for-profit society called Emerging Christian Way (ECW) Media Society.

In mid-2013, the board of ECW made the decision to suspend activities of Wood Lake at the end of the year, due to continuously declining sales, but while the company could still provide a payout to employees.

Two long-time employees, Patty Berube and Debbie Joyal MacDonald, made an offer to the board to buy the company and continue publishing books and curriculum. Their offer was made for 3 primary reasons: to keep their jobs, to not leave the long-time loyal customers without a curriculum, and to keep some of the Wood Lake family working as either employees or contractors. The board agreed, with some stipulations, and this latest era of Wood Lake was born in January 2014.

In the last eight plus years, Wood Lake has proudly carried on the traditions started many years ago, continuing to publish both *Seasons of the Spirit* and *Whole People of God*, as well as 70 books and many reprints of older titles. With the help of some former employees, mostly contracted, and a few new ones, with some major cost-cutting changes and a move to a smaller facility, the company was profitable again. Thanks to the guidance of Robert MacDonald, the company has been rebranded and we've searched out new authors and customers. Many of our books have won awards these last few years.

Then the pandemic! For two and a-half years the company struggled like most publishers and many other businesses. We've dealt with churches not being able to meet, suspending Christian education classes indefinitely, moving services to Zoom, and no singing together. Sales have declined and we had losses again, despite government assistance. We are still hanging in, doing the work, and serving our customers and – most days with smiles on our faces. We are optimistic that whatever a “new normal” will be, we will be carrying on the legacy that started 40 years ago.

■ A LEGACY AND A PROMISE

In 2018 Donald Schmidt, who in addition to editing *Whole People of God* and *Seasons of the Spirit* was also serving in part-time parish ministry, came to Wood Lake with an idea. He loved leading Bible study groups, and noticed that there was a huge hunger in many churches for resources that could introduce the Bible to progressive Christians. He defined “progressive Christian” not as a political stance, but rather simply those people all across the spectrum who realized they did not know all the answers, and who wanted to be challenged to think about the Bible and make their own decisions about what it was saying to them in today’s world.

Wood Lake was interested, and decided to try publishing some of his work. The first volume was *Revelation for Progressive Christians* which many thought was an odd choice for a publisher like Wood Lake. However when it went into its third printing they realized they were onto something!

Additional volumes so far have addressed the *Birth of Jesus*, the *Death of Jesus*, *Easter*, *Creation*, the *Beatitudes* and *Women of the Hebrew Scriptures*. The year 2022 will see volumes on *Women of the New Testament* and *Homosexuality*.

Wood Lake continues publishing books that serve a unique need within the progressive church, including several books on how to talk about sex with all ages, and how to teach issues around sexuality, the latest being *Talk Sex Today* by Meg Hickling and Saleema Noon.

They have also produced books about reconciliation between the immigrant (white) population and indigenous peoples, including *Sorry: Why the United Church Apologized* which explains in simple terms why the United Church felt called to apologize for the wrongs they perpetuated in their work with residential schools.

Wood Lake has also produced several music resources, including 9 volumes of world music used with *Seasons of the Spirit*, a supplement to *Voices United* (the United Church of Canada hymnal) called *More Voices*, and a large print hymnal called *Hymns We Love to Sing*. A popular volume of songs for all ages called *Rainbow Songbook* was released in 2000 and followed up with a second volume, *Sunshine Songbook*, in 2016.

Today, Wood Lake is committed to continuing its 40



Top Left: WPOG Editor and Wood Lake Author Donald Schmidt

Top middle: Paige Dobson

Top right: Sherry Collins

Left: Owners of Wood Lake Publishing – Debbie Joyal MacDonald & Patty Berube

Right: Robert MacDonald

year history of bringing readers and faith formation practitioners unique and accessible resources that nurture, inspire, and challenge our common and essential spirituality for our day.

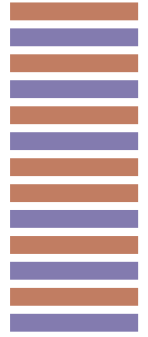
In honour of our history, and the hundreds of people who have contributed to our journey, we celebrate the vision of our founders, the inspiration of the contributors to our many and wonderful products, and the dedication of the staff and contractors that made it all real and possible.

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WOOD LAKE

Imagining,
Living and Telling
the Faith Story.



WOOD LAKE IS THE FAITH STORY COMPANY.

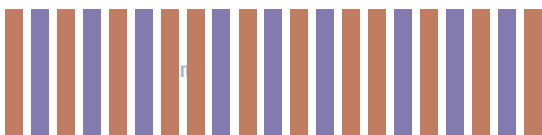
It has told

- the story of the seasons of the earth, the people of God, and the place and purpose of faith in the world;
- the story of the faith journey, from birth to death;
- the story of Jesus and the churches that carry his message.

Wood Lake has been telling stories for more than 35 years. During that time, it has given form and substance to the words, songs, pictures, and ideas of hundreds of storytellers.

Those stories have taken a multitude of forms – parables, poems, drawings, prayers, epiphanies, songs, books, paintings, hymns, curricula – all driven by a common mission of serving those on the faith journey.

40 YEARS



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