

Women speak out

It is time for women to speak out - and time for society to listen.

That is the message that Marie Louise Uhr came back to Canberra with after attending the first NSW State conference of Women And The Australian Church (WATAC).

The following are her thoughts on the conference:

"It is time for women to speak out from their experience, to say loudly and clearly what life in Australian church and Australian society is like for them. Women have spoken openly and deeply about their experiences to other women, and have found that by listening carefully (with great care) to each other, they can, in the classic phrase of Nellie Morton, begin to 'hear each other into being'. Now, with the courage and assurance they have given to one another, it is time for many women to begin to speak openly to Church and to society.

"Helen Kearins' song written for

the conference sings of women 'no more living in silence, no more walking in fear'.

"The conference of the Movement For the Ordination of Women, held the week before, had the theme: 'Of Good Courage'. The coincidence is not, I believe, accidental: it affirms that women in churches throughout Australia are realising that now is the time for courageous speaking out.

"In Sydney, women spoke out about the need for justice. Franca Arena spoke of the pain of being migrant, especially the pain of being migrant woman.

"Erin White spoke of the pain of being excluded from positions of authority in the official life of the Church because of being woman; of the pain of finding ourselves on the margins; she reminded us that it is easier to tune into the exclusion of others than to get in touch with our own oppression.

"A panel of four speakers raised issues of education and training, how they exclude women from many areas of human life, how

they shape us to accept the traditional labels of masculine and feminine. And again and again from the floor people raised the burning question of the pain of being aboriginal women and men in today's Australia.

"For me the most powerful moment of the conference was the Saturday evening Eucharist. It was the first time I had been part of a Catholic ceremony of worship in which female and male symbols and words were used for God.

"Attendance at this conference has given me hope for the life of women in the Church - and therefore for the life of the Church. It is exciting to know that there are so many there who care deeply and are prepared to work and suffer, if need be, to bring the full gifts of women to flower in the Church.

"If, as I believe, women are the voice of the prophets today, then, whether or not they are ignored as Jeremiah was ignored, they are speaking the way of God's future."

Marie Louise Uhr.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Women of the Scriptures

I'm sure that all readers of Catholic Voice would agree with George Mills (CV July) that a "clear and complete coverage of scripture" is important for religious education programs in schools.

I would suggest, however, that whereas in 1960 it may have seemed right and proper to present Old Testament scripture under the heading of "Great Men", in 1990, in a Church dedicated to living in solidarity with the poor and the outcast, it is neces-

sary to show God also working in the lives of the lowly.

We need to look not just at Moses but also at the five women on whom his life depended: his mother, Jochebed, his sister, Miriam, the Pharaoh's daughter and the two midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, who quietly and gently risked their lives to save and nurture the infant male Hebrew child.

We need to read not just of Abraham but also of Sarah and Hagar. Hagar is, after all, a pivotal figure in biblical theology. She is the first person in

scripture whom a divine messenger visits; the only person who dares to name the deity. Within the historical memories of Israel, she is the first woman to hear an annunciation, the only one to receive a divine promise of descendants and the first to weep for her dying child.

We need to read of Ruth, who left her homeland for a foreign land out of love for Naomi her mother in law; of Hannah, who teaches us how to pray openly before God; of the Syrophenician woman who helped Jesus

to see that not only the Chosen People but all races and cultures are welcome at God's table.

Scripture is an apparently inexhaustible source of riches. Many of its treasures for women today are stories that are not yet part of our major liturgical readings; we need caution in deciding what are the important stories, what are the main themes, and each age needs to find its own.

Today, Scripture is clearly teaching us that women are equal partners with men in salvation history.

**MARIE LOUISE UHR,
Cook ACT.**