

E-QUALITY



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CBE'S LEGACY

By Jessica Colund

I recently had the opportunity to interview three of CBE's most devoted members: Alvera Mickelsen, Ginny Erickson, and Betty Clark. They were crowded around a table in CBE's office, having volunteered to organize our historical files. As a newcomer to CBE, I had expected a cordial but formal interview (perhaps even with a few awkward silences). Instead, I was surprised and delighted by their sincerity and warmth. They welcomed me into the friendly conversation of longtime companions, openly discussed their lives with me, and asked me about my own life. They displayed all the humility and grace of true disciples of Jesus Christ.



Alvera Mickelsen

Each of these women is an integral part of CBE's legacy. Alvera is one of the beloved founders of the organization and is still actively involved in its workings. She grew up in a very strict church that decidedly did not have egalitarian views. Her mother was a very talented Bible teacher who was influential in the church until a new pastor came on staff and told her that she should not be teaching men. She graciously stepped down, but the man who replaced her was not a gifted teacher. Eventually, he became discouraged and quit, and Alvera's mother was asked if she would temporarily return to her position until another man could be found. The church did not try too hard to find a replacement at that time, but when another new pastor was hired, she was once again asked to step down, solely based on her gender. Alvera's father, who was always supportive of his wife's ministry, was outraged. "Everyone knows your mama's the best teacher in the church!" Alvera remembers him saying.

While most females were picking jobs as nurses, teachers, or office workers, Alvera was working at a railroad and commuting by train to take classes at Moody Bible Institute.

As an inquisitive person by nature and a member of her high school's debate team, Alvera questioned assumptions about gender and nearly every other assumption she heard from a very early age. It was this unwillingness to accept blindly the status quo that allowed her to choose a career outside of the standard three options for women. While most females were picking jobs as nurses, teachers, or office workers, Alvera was working at a railroad and commuting by train to take classes at Moody Bible Institute. In addition, she got Master's degrees in journalism from both Wheaton College and Northwestern University, and she went to Bethel Seminary for a year. She also raised two daughters, worked as a

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magazine editor in Chicago, was in charge of the publications of a Baptist ministry for sixteen years, wrote curriculum, and taught journalism at Bethel and Wheaton.

Ginny Erickson

Ginny Erickson is also a gifted Christian woman. She has been a member of CBE for over fifteen years and has supported the organization through volunteering and writing book reviews. Like Alvera, Ginny grew up in a church with strictly complementarian values. In fact, she doesn't remember thinking about women in ministry as a child because it was never even a question at her church. As soon as she became aware of the issue, however, she found it very fascinating. As a young adult, she took Bible classes at Bethel College (which in those days were half the price of regular classes). She got her teacher's certificate and taught public school while raising three children.

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When asked who some of her role models are, Ginny responded unhesitatingly, "Alvera Mickelsen!" They both came from similar backgrounds, and Ginny admires the way Alvera questioned what she had been told. Another of her role models is her niece, who is twenty years her junior. From youthful beginnings as a flower girl in Ginny's wedding when she was only three years old, she went on to Fuller Seminary and became the head pastor of a Presbyterian church in Baltimore and inspired incredible revival in it.

Betty Clark

Betty Clark, like Alvera and Ginny, is passionate about biblical equality. She joined CBE after attending the 2003 Orlando conference and has faithfully volunteered at CBE almost every week—and sometimes more than once a week—since then. She grew up in a small country church where, similar to Alvera's and Ginny's churches, men were always given the leadership positions. Betty felt in her heart that her childhood church, which restricted the gifts of women, was mistaken, yet she felt that she did not know the Bible well enough to question her educated pastors. She chose not to discuss the issue with her parents very much, even though her father, who had fulfilled his lifelong dream of becoming a pastor at age 65, greatly respected women evangelists.

It wasn't until much later in life that Betty came to uphold her current beliefs about women. She raised three children and did office administration work for twenty-five years in Chicago. While living in Chicago, her first husband passed away. She struggled to deal with her loss for years, but moved to Minnesota and things began to change for the better. It was there that she met her second husband and eventually became a part of CBE's ministry.

"I just want you to know that I no longer need you to get back to me," Betty told him. "I have come to my own conclusions."

A big turning point in Betty's life occurred when her friend gave her a paper she had written promoting women in ministry. The paper answered many of Betty's questions about the issue, but she still wanted to discuss it with her pastor. She brought the article to him and explained that she was beginning to think that women should be allowed to preach. He told her that he would read the article and get back to her.

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She carefully rehearsed what she would say to him in the follow-up meeting, but after several months it became clear that he was postponing the meeting indefinitely. Every time she saw him in church, he would say, "I am going to get back to you," but he never did. Feeling justifiably hurt and angry, she scheduled another appointment with him. "I just want you to know that I no longer need you to get back to me," she told him. "I have come to my own conclusions."

All three of these women have impacted CBE through their generosity, wisdom, and courage. It is because of committed members like Ginny, Alvera, and Betty that CBE has grown from a small box in a mobile home to an international organization providing resources to Christians on six continents. These indomitable women are optimistic that CBE will keep growing until its supporters work themselves out of a job, and that a day will come when CBE's mission is so accepted that the organization is no longer necessary. May it be so.



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