



## Part One

By Nikki Tyrrell



**"It is fair to say that my experiences influenced the way I interact with the men in my life."**

Sometimes I feel like the church is a "man's" world. There are so many rules that I don't always know — "man" rules for how to have a conversation or deal with a problem. I don't speak "man." I listen, but sometimes I don't understand. This is unfortunate because, as the preschool director, I have to work with men in our congregation all the time. It's also uncomfortable, at times, for me because I grew up in a congregation where women didn't go to voters' meetings or have a voice in the church.

Speaking "woman" suits me. I am not only a preschool teacher at my church but also a wife and mother living in a house with four daughters, which means sometimes my life and job get a little bit dramatic. I am all about enjoying "a good cry," and my girls and I love nothing better than to bond over a "chick flick." My job is to nurture others, so the language I use is all about building relationships, not finishing tasks or solving problems.

It is fair to say that my experiences have influenced the way I interact with the men in my life. Some men have disappointed and hurt me. In the past, every time there was conflict, my answer was to hide from it ... avoid it. When that didn't work, I would confront it aggressively, head on. I had a "get them before they get me" strategy when it came to speaking "man." I would feel an intense need to get what I wanted to say off my chest right away, no matter who or what I thought the problem was. This was a bad choice when I actually had to talk to my pastor.

That night, I walked into church with my hands on my hips and my dander up, ready to "discuss" the Bible class topic and how I thought it was inappropriate for my teenage daughters. I stopped Pastor Wolters in the hall and said, "I need to talk to you." He was between services and confirmation class, but stopped

and said, "Okay." I took that as an invitation to unload in a pretty emotional manner. He reacted by speaking "man" which challenged and confused me. I stormed out, frustrated and crying, feeling unheard.

When I had to go out of town for a meeting, the events of the night before nagged at me. I spent the day praying and went to another pastor to ask for advice. I was so upset that I felt like I couldn't even take communion.

After another day of thinking and praying, I decided to call my pastor. This time the conversation began with, "Is this a good time to talk?" and went forward from there. It was an opportunity to be honest about what didn't work and speak words of forgiveness.

Boundaries developed in our working relationship because of that incident and have continued in our work together over the years. If I need to talk about something, I make an appointment. We are both busy, so it is better if neither of us is caught off guard and we have time to listen and respond.

There are times when it is really easy to bring a personal issue into the church environment. Consequently, it is very important that we conduct ourselves as professionals whenever we deal with the public or work together. The members of our congregation and the families at our church's preschool are watching how we interact. That is just how it is. I can't control how fast the world spins, but I can control when I talk about it. I also try to make sure that I keep Pastor informed about the little things by sending emails or quick notes. I hate being the last to know, especially if it is going to affect how I do my job. Pastor hates that too.

Besides the fact that we don't always speak the same language, I think Pastor Wolters would tell you

that there are not two people who are more different than he and I. I believe in a public school education; he and his wife homeschool their children. I did not grow up in the LCMS; his dad was an LCMS pastor. He loves camping with his family; my idea of "roughing it" on vacation is a nice hotel and ordering pizza. I love teaching young children, and he prefers teens and adults. Sometimes we don't agree, but I am mindful of his office, and he is aware of my past experiences. If it is an issue that doesn't affect anyone's faith, we might agree to disagree. The fact is that we are both God's children. That is the one thing we will always have in common.

At times I feel I need an interpreter, especially when I have to

remind the men at church that I might not see a situation the same way they do. I have even been known to get frustrated and cry at a voters' meeting. Since this is the way I am hard-wired, I am okay with this.

I try to remember that even if I am comfortable talking about my feelings, the men I am working with might not be comfortable hearing them. I need to remind myself to process the situation and deal with problems in the way that my heavenly Father would have me do it ... as a woman of faith, living in this world, whose skills and language are a gift from Him.

I still speak "woman," but with Jesus' help I am learning the other language and how to survive in a "man's" world. Q



**Perhaps especially in the challenging relationships of men and women working together in the church, we need to remember that, in the end, forgiveness is "all we have."**

## Part Two *By Rev. Michael Wolters*

I have been asked by Nikki Tyrrell, who wrote the article [above], to give "my side of the story" concerning our working and personal relationship in the church at Redeemer Lutheran in Dickinson, North Dakota. When I think of the relationships between men and women working in the church, and my relationship with Nikki in particular, I think of three things: honesty, perception, and forgiveness.

Nikki referred in her article to the tense discussion we had one evening in the sanctuary at Redeemer. That discussion was many things, but it was first and foremost honest. As a man I like to deal with facts (or what I believe to be factual), and so I told her that some of what she was saying was "ludicrous." She, in turn, told me that my choice of words was "offensive" to her. My words tore at her heart, but our conversation was still productive because it was honest.

In her article, Nikki mentioned two extremes: avoiding conflict and diving into conflict head-on. In my opinion, working relationships between men and women in the church are aided when loving, measured honesty replaces either avoidance or rushed aggressiveness.

Our conversation that night also had to do with perception. I was very analytical about our exchange. I thought to myself: "Well, we got the facts and our feelings out in the open. We were honest with each other and expressed apologies to and respect for each other." In my mind it was over. Months later I learned from Nikki that it was not so easily dismissed for her. She felt unresolved emotions and hurt. She felt she had hurt me and been disrespectful, while my remembrance was that she had simply been forthright. Men and women can perceive things differently, but that night Nikki and I

learned it on a more personal level. Even more important, we learned to respect the perceptions of the other person and to be attuned to perceptions of reality that differ from our own. But the most important element (by far!) in our relationship (and all Christian relationships) is an "oldie, but a goodie" — forgiveness. Nikki and I have discussed many times, with good humor, that we are almost complete opposites. The fact is we have very little in common except ... the forgiveness and love of Jesus Christ! And we rejoice in that and have a functional relationship only because of it. I believe that sometimes we Christians talk about forgiveness and believe in forgiveness, but fail to completely rely upon forgiveness. The Rev. Dr. Richard Kapfer, former district president of Iowa West, wrote the following:

*Forgiveness is all that we have. We don't have perfection. We don't have any way to right most wrongs or to take away the hurts that our sins have caused. We don't have any way to re-grow our children or any way to take back the wasted words, wasted time, and wasted opportunities. There is only one way — the way of forgiveness. We have the privilege of declaring that and of openly modeling that.*

Perhaps especially in the challenging relationships of men and women working together in the church, we need to remember that, in the end, forgiveness is "all we have." Though humanly speaking, Nikki and I are very different people, we cherish each other in Christ. We forgive each other in Christ. We do our work together in Christ. In and through Him, our relationship as co-workers in the church truly is better together. Q