

From This Corner  
Larry R. Baird

**The Rev. Helena L. Champlin**  
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It was 1972 and I arrived in Wyoming, New York to begin my first appointment: Wyoming and Covington. Superintendent Joseph Shipman's last words to me the night of my take-in were sage, "Larry, no girls in the parsonage overnight without a chaperone." It seemed like good sense to me but having the order from the DS was helpful for the young bachelor I was at the time. I knew right then and there I could depend on Superintendent Shipman for no-nonsense practical down to earth counsel.

Another thing he told me in preparation for the assignment was that I would have in my parish a retired woman pastor by the name of Helena Champlin. My first thoughts were not holy. I had heard of some instances where having a retired pastor in your church, especially when you were just starting out, was not necessarily a good thing. On top of it, "Helena" was obviously a different gender than every pastor I had ever known. This fact, I admit, made me even more suspicious of what was ahead. I did note, however, his words that would again indicate wisdom. He said, "You might want to get to know her. She can be a good deal of help to you."



One of my first visits was to The Rev. Helena Lorraine Champlin in her little home she had built on a modest retirement. There a wonderful friendship began between a very green and cocky young pastor and one of the wisest pastors I have ever had the privilege of meeting. Helena's pioneering career had by that time covered some fifty-five years. She had retired in 1962. She had been the daughter of a pastor, graduated valedictorian from Stamford High School and on a scholarship gone to Syracuse University. In 1917 she enlisted in the Board of Home Missions and became a director of religious education. She worked in that capacity until 1924. Called to be an ordained pastor, she then completed more required studies and was ordained a deacon and then elder in 1926. She continued graduate work at Boston University where she earned other degrees, a M.A. in 1927 and her M.Div (then a B.D.) cum laude in 1930. Not stopping there, she completed all course requirements for Ph.D. in 1933.

For me Helena was in the right place at the right time. Her counsel was sterling. Her ability to mentor was worthy of the designation “spiritual director.” She did all of it in a fashion that instilled in me the desire to become the best pastor I could possibly be. She taught me to truly love God’s people and to be patient with them even when they did not want to go where I thought they should. She taught me that ministry in rural upstate New York was as holy and fulfilling as any ministry to which I might aspire. She herself loved the culture of Boston, Massachusetts, but was content in ministry in every little town to which the men of the conference appointed her. This contentment was not acquiescence, but from her sense of the holiness of the call to be a pastor. By the time she died in 1988 she was able to see women treated more equitably. The fact of the matter is that if Helena had been of my generation she could very likely have become Bishop Helena L. Champlin. Instead, she was one of the most trained, skilled, and educated pastors of some of the smallest churches in Western New York. She was also in the right place at the right time for me.

I thank God for my mentor The Rev. Helena L. Champlin. I find pleasure in knowing her approach, attitude, and some of her skills are in operation in my ministry. So should you because I know that I am better pastor and superintendent because of her. That is why I write of her today. I do not want her to be forgotten. Her name was Helena Lorraine Champlin. She was an ordained elder. She was my friend. She was my mentor.