

Rev. Myra Sparks

New minister at Owendale, Gagetown, half a 'clergy couple'

After having been a minister of seven churches, serving only two should be a breeze for Rev. Myra Sparks.

The new pastor of the United Methodist churches in Owendale and Gagetown gave her first sermons June 15.

She comes from Ontonagon county in the western Upper Peninsula, where she, her husband, Rev. Wayne Sparks, and one other minister served seven churches.

Each of the trio gave either two or three sermons each Sunday, which could mean driving 80 miles. The third largest county in Michigan in area has a population of only about 11,000.

Six of the churches were

Lisa Brown on MMPA milk tour

Lisa Brown of Ubly was among more than 80 4-H members and adult leaders from throughout Michigan who participated in the 43rd annual Michigan Milk Producers' Association milk marketing tour Tuesday and Wednesday of last week.

The participants toured the MMPA Detroit office and Detroit Pure Milk Co., discussed the association's marketing and price bargaining efforts and member services with MMPA President Glenn Lake and General Manager Jack Barnes, participated in a mock problem-solving session and attended a banquet at the Holiday Inn in suburban Southfield.

Methodist, but the other was Presbyterian. "All you had to remember was to say 'debt and debtors' instead of 'trespass and trespassers' and you were okay," Rev. Sparks explained with a smile.

Being married to a minister makes it somewhat difficult for the church hierarchy to make assignments. "It's not easy to move clergy couples," she said.

What is needed is two vacancies at the same time.

The Upper Thumb fit the bill as the Caseville United Methodist church was also in need of a minister and that is where her husband has been assigned. The church cabinet decided the couple and their family will live in the parsonage at Caseville.

REV. AND REV. SPARKS have four children. Debra will be a junior at Adrian College this fall, Nathan will be a freshman there, Bess Anne will be a senior at Caseville High School and Peter will be a ninth grader.

The ministerial couple, married 21 years, has a special fondness for Adrian College. They met while Wayne Sparks was a student there and his wife-to-be was a teacher at the state Girls Training School in Adrian.

Myra Sparks taught five years before leaving that profession to raise her family.

"I had always been interested in the church, but being a pastor was one area I never thought a woman could be."

But times change, and in the mid-60s, a prayer group at the church her husband

was at prayed for someone from the congregation to go into the ministry. It was her husband who came to her and asked, "Have you ever considered being a minister?"

Her answer was obviously "yes." Then came five years of study by correspondence with the Garrett Theological Seminary at Evanston, Ill., with one month spent on campus each summer.

REV. SPARKS, 45, BECAME a licensed minister in 1972, but, "They didn't know what to do with a clergy couple."

As a result, she didn't receive her first ministerial assignment until 1976, when her husband was already assigned to Ontonagon county.

The Owendale and Gagetown churches thus are her second assignment. Rev. Sparks replaces Rev. William McBride, who went to a church in Flint.

She jokes about the Port Huron district superintendent, who had said to her and her husband, "I've never worked with a clergy couple before," but now has to work with two couples. Both members of the other clergy couple are assigned to the same church.

Unlike that other couple, and non-pastoral couples, she and her husband don't have the luxury of being together on Sunday mornings. "We get together on vacation."

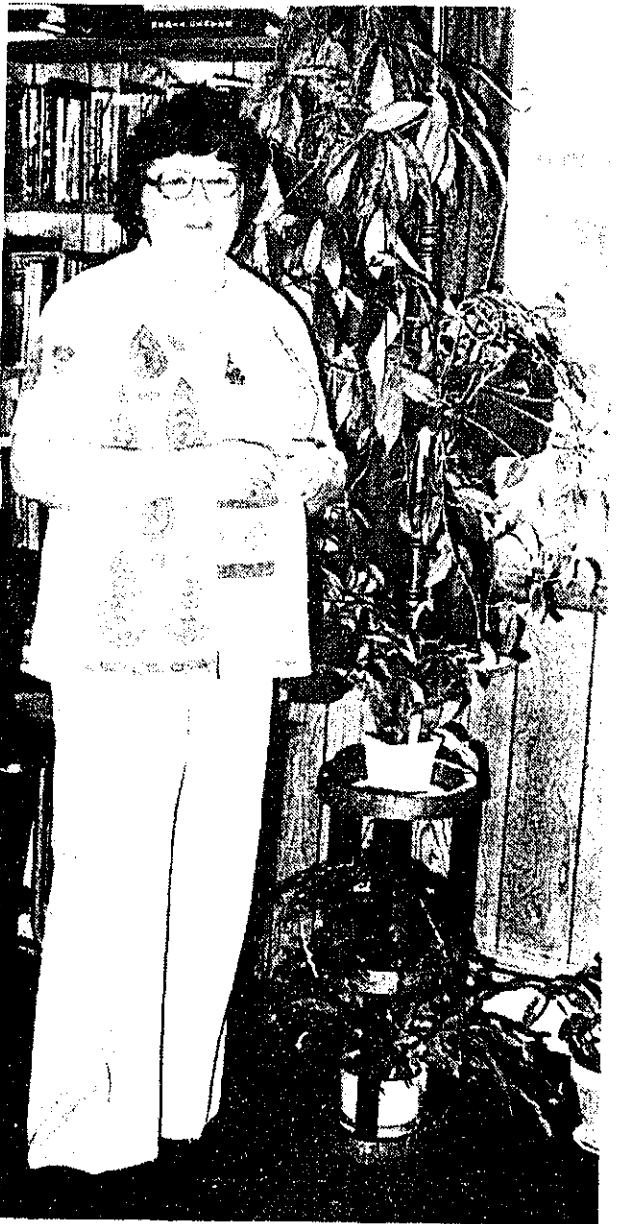
REV. SPARKS DESCRIBES her ministry as "a caring ministry."

Her instincts as a mother and ex-teacher may show in that she likes to have a children's service as part of

each Sunday morning worship service.

As for the inevitable question of whether she sometimes meets resistance in her pastoral duties because

she is a woman, she replied, "I find that when people get acquainted with you and work with you as an individual, the sex thing isn't important."



REV. MYRA SPARKS

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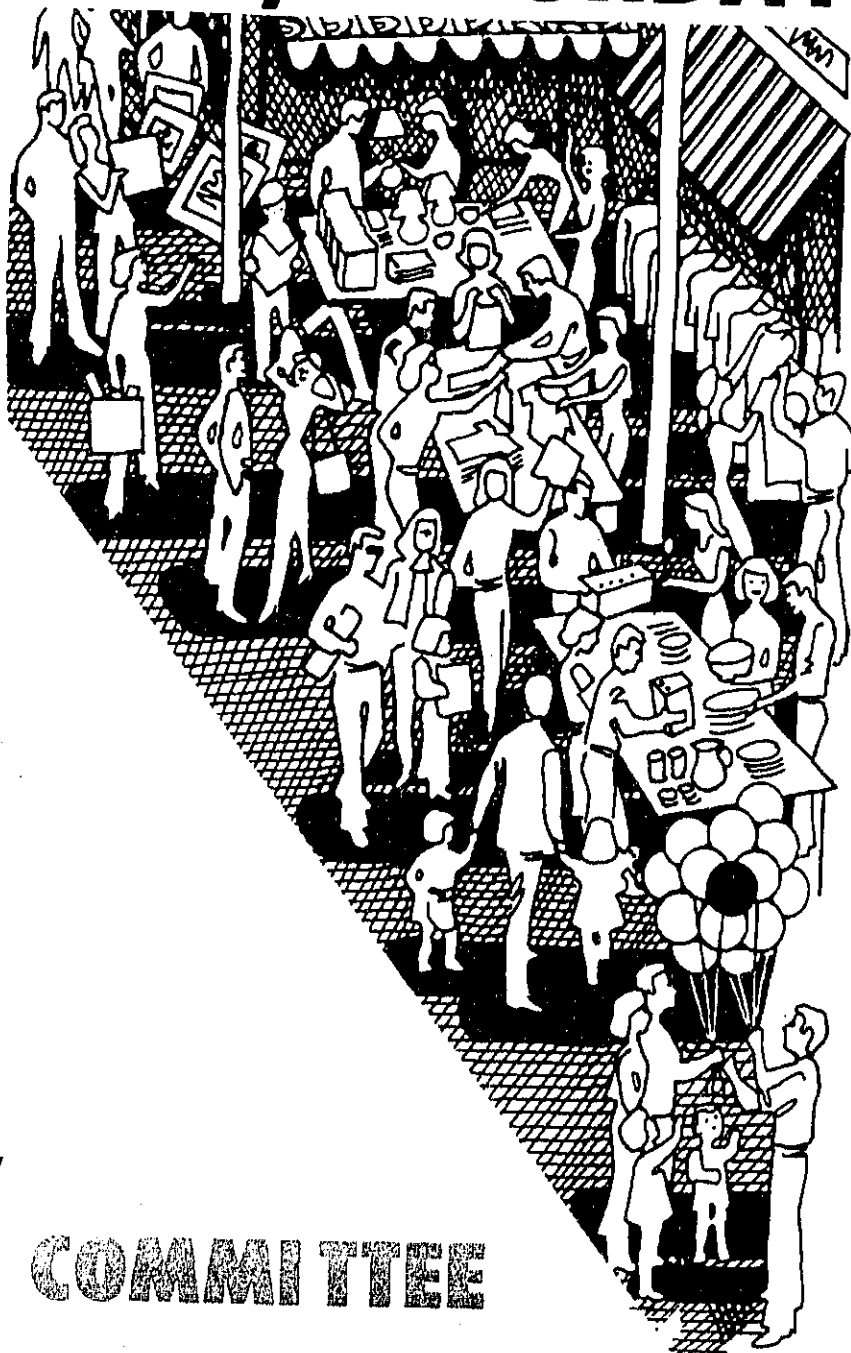
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