

Prescription for a New Year



by **Eunice K. M. Ernst, CNM, MPH, DSc(Hon), FACNM, ACNM President**

Less than a year into my term as president, I am still in the learning mode. It was simpler when I was president 45 years ago, and we were such a small group. We all knew one another, trusted one another, and worked for a common cause that we so passionately believed in. What has changed? I don't think the folks who go into midwifery have changed as much as the world around us, which is forcing the people and the profession to adapt or die.

But change does not just present us with challenges. It presents opportunities for those willing to take a risk and explore them. Some of the opportunities are the savings of time, talents, and resources by expanding our use of the Internet for communication. Some splendid emerging examples are the restructuring of ACNM for more efficient and effective operations, the methods applied for member input in the revision of the bylaws, and collaboration with related organizations, all of which are working toward developing a more responsive and affordable system for the delivery of both preventive health care and medical care to all people.

The coming years will not be easy. Change is never easy. It requires a strong commitment, carefully crafted articulation of needs and how they may be met, willingness to give and take, judicious use of

resources, and most of all, participation of all the midwifery stake holders. The staff, Board of Directors, hundreds of volunteers, and the Foundations that fund the special projects and ongoing work of ACNM cannot do it alone. Every stakeholder — those who want their children and grandchildren to be able to have a midwife on their team of care providers, those who may never have children but want to restore the confidence of women in giving birth, those who have given their lives to being “with women” — must join us now to make midwifery part of the solution to improving the care of childbearing women and families. If paying your dues is all you can do, do it. Do it so you can take advantage of the opportunities available to you to meet with your colleagues on the Web and in person. Do it to be inspired, have your energy restored, and trade tips for improving our education and practice. Be part of the solution for this generation of midwives!

To do so we must work with the willing and educate the not yet willing about the benefits of midwifery and how to integrate midwifery into our system of care. I am greatly encouraged by the many members who have already offered to help. Not one person that I have asked to take on a task has refused. I ask all of you to make 2008 a year when we achieve full member participation, state by state, region by region. I ask each of you to share your ideas on how to best meet the challenges and opportunities you face with the national office staff and your board.

In addition to improving communication, a couple of special projects have been started. We have formed a President's Task Force on Health Care Reform, chaired by Marion McCartney, to prepare information and materials to help you promote midwifery at local, state and

national policy levels. I hate to keep after you about collecting data, but in order to be effective with policy makers we must have facts. There are a couple of marvelous data collection tools available. One, the AABC Uniform Data Set (UDS), has the advantage of use by all providers in all settings and may be viewed at www.birthcenters.org. We also must have human interest stories to support the data. Stories are often the best way to communicate what a midwife does and why women need and use their services. Will you share some of your stories? Send them to the national office with “Human Interest Story” written on the envelope or in the subject line, or if you prefer to send by email, to kittyernst@comcast.net. I will see that your story gets to the right person. Be sure to remove all identification except the region in which you practice. These stories will be used by the Health Care Reform Task Force to draw a picture of midwifery in this country.

My desire is to complement the work of your Regional Representative with what I call the “President's Outreach Program” — to talk with students and midwives in the trenches of education and practice so that I may better understand the issues you face and strategize together for the future. I will try to respond to all invitations to gatherings of members to learn from you and to share my thoughts. I remember that Sister Angela did this when she was ACNM president (1981-82), and it brought the mission of our work home to those with whom she met — especially those who feel isolated and ask, “What does ACNM do for me?”

I know that all of this sounds like a lot of work, but again I remind you of Helen Keller's words, “Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much.” **Q** kittyernst@comcast.net

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