

“To Lead Them to the Higher Life”: Women Workers at All Peoples’ Mission, 1907-1914

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The experience of Christian women is a component of church history that is being investigated by increasing numbers of historians. Areas of research once thought to be exhausted are yielding new interpretations as historians consider the place of gender in shaping the story of Christianity. One such subject is the work of a Methodist mission among poor immigrants in Winnipeg’s North End known as All Peoples’ Mission. The Mission has intrigued some historians because of its connection to the social gospel movement and J.S. Woodsworth, the first leader of the socialist Canadian Co-operative Commonwealth Party (CCF).¹ Until now, however, there has been no attempt to examine the nature and purpose of the tasks carried out by the majority of All Peoples’ staff, that is, its female employees.

It is my contention that the nature and the purpose of the work performed by women while employed by the Mission was circumscribed by their gender and was consistent with an ideology of maternalism. This maternalist, or “maternal feminist” ethic, held that a woman’s supposedly innate nurturing, care-giving and “mothering” qualities gave her a right and a duty to circulate outside the home and participate in public activities such as social service work.² The work performed by the women workers at All Peoples’ Mission was shaped fundamentally by maternalist ideas, and was directed primarily at the homes of immigrants.

This essay will begin by placing my research on the Mission’s female employees in an historiographical context. The paper will then

briefly examine the background and identity of the women, followed by an analysis of the nature and purpose of their work during the period of Woodsworth's superintendency, 1907-1913. The All Peoples' Mission papers housed in the United Church Archives at the University of Winnipeg, issues of the *Christian Guardian* from 1907-1914, and Methodist conference reports were consulted in order to identify the Mission's female employees and their responsibilities.³ The tasks women at the Mission were given to perform were assumed to suit their maternal aptitudes. Whether these duties served to advance the status of women in the church is an unresolved issue.

There is no general agreement on whether the work Protestant women performed while serving in church orders like the diaconate helped or hindered the movement to female autonomy. In other words, did deaconesses and their work represent a "side road" on the way to female ordination? If the diaconate was indeed a diversion from the path to autonomy, was their maternalistic approach to social work the cause of the detour? The connection between a maternalist ideology and social service has been noted in several studies of female church workers.⁴ John Thomas argues that deaconesses (a category that included the majority of the Mission's female workers) did not jeopardise the traditional, patriarchal structure of the church's hierarchy. The diaconate was a poor source for feminist autonomy in Canadian Methodism.⁵ Nancy Hall does not entirely accept this negative assessment of Methodist deaconesses. She maintains that while deaconesses generally did not agitate for female ordination, they did expand the opportunities of women within the church.⁶ More recently, Phyllis Airhart has noted that missions like All Peoples' in Winnipeg did "provide unique opportunities for Methodist women."⁷ The significance of Methodist women's organizations and their work is clearly an unresolved historical issue. There is not as much debate, however, on the identity and background of the women who made up the diaconate and worked at institutions like All Peoples' Mission.⁸

The women who were employed at the Mission came from the English-Canadian, middle-class, Protestant homes.⁹ Most were from Ontario. Three of the four deaconesses sent to All Peoples' Mission in 1909 were Ontarians: Maud Barlow, Woodstock; Annie Joynt, Lucknow; Evalyn Scrigley, Sault Ste. Marie.¹⁰ A deaconess employed at the Mission would have completed one or two years of training at the National Training School in Toronto established in 1894.¹¹ Hall has argued that

because monetary provision for room and board had to be made for the school, the majority of those who joined the diaconate were from the middle-class. Thomas concurs, noting that the deaconesses were drawn from “families of the middling sort.”¹²

Methodist women who left their comfortable homes to become deaconesses and eventually work at All Peoples’ seem to have done so because they felt called to social service within the church. Hall claims that most deaconesses had strong Christian family backgrounds and responded to the church’s call for committed Christian female workers.¹³ The testimonies of the women at the National Training School in Toronto, which were printed in the *Christian Guardian*, have a religious flavour that support Hall’s assertion.¹⁴ It is unlikely, however, that the *Guardian*, a church organ, would print the testimony of a woman who joined the order for reasons other than Christian commitment.

An unpublished reason a woman may have become a deaconess was her desire to remain single in order to pursue a vocation of teaching and/or social work.¹⁵ In an era when the opportunities for women outside the home were limited, a deaconess, consecrated by her commitment to Christian service and set apart from other women by her dark navy cravenette uniform, would be free to work outside the home with the church’s sanction.¹⁶ Yet, although released from the responsibilities of marriage and motherhood, the nature and purpose of women’s work at the Mission was founded on the belief of the inseparable connection between women, their maternal gifts, and the home. Despite their singleness, the women at All Peoples’ incarnated an ideology of maternalism through their work.

The women working at All Peoples’ were seen to be using their supposedly inborn maternal qualities to enlighten the residents of the North End. Walter Pavy, a minister at the Mission, claimed that its female staff needed “warm mother hearts [in order to] to teach other mothers the value of cleanliness of life and home, and the sacredness of a child.”¹⁷ A women’s work was directed towards either children, young girls, or married women.¹⁸ Her essential duty was to educate immigrant children and mothers in order to transform their family environment, that is, their homes. This domestically oriented work sprang from a growing fear of what might become of the immigrants were their homes not redeemed.

If there was one area in Western Canada prior to the First World War where the traditional English-Canadian idea of the home was being actively undermined, it was the district north of the Canadian Pacific

railroad tracks in Winnipeg, the North End. The North End, home to most of the city's poorer immigrants, was well known for its crowded tenement houses and lack of adequate sanitary works.¹⁹ The Mission's female employees were deeply concerned about the condition of many homes around the Mission, especially those belonging to foreign, that is, non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants. Agnes Allen could not see how a dirty home, full of boarders and liquor could possibly allow children to develop properly; Lillian Mason wondered how some immigrants could even stand to live in miserable conditions.²⁰ When the women did have something good to say about an immigrants' home, it was usually related to the dwelling's cleanliness and order. One deaconess, visiting the "cleanest Polish home she had ever seen," noted that within it, "order prevailed everywhere, from the well washed floor to the dishes washed and neatly piled on the table."²¹ The home's cleanliness may have impressed the woman because cleanliness, often associated with moral purity, was part of a middle-class view of a proper English-Canadian home.²²

Some male middle-class, English-Canadian, Methodist Church leaders also expressed their anxiety over the living conditions of families in the North End. Their concern, however, seems to have been motivated more by patriotism than a sense of propriety. They worried about the future of Canada, and the church in Canada, if crowded, dirty homes were allowed to become a permanent part of society. In an article entitled "The Raw Material of Canadian Citizenship," which appeared in the *Christian Guardian* in 1908, Winnipeg clergyman S.P. Rose wondered how honest men and clean women could emerge from homes where "light, cleanliness, good food, and reserve [were] particularly out of the question."²³ J.W. Aikens, Field Secretary of the Methodist Temperance and Moral Reform Society, believed that this was a major factor in the assimilation process. He claimed that "by uniting the various nations we may produce a great national character, and the most important factor contributing to it will be the homes of the people."²⁴ These ministers, however, would not be the ones labouring to transform the homes of the North End. The persons set apart for that task were All Peoples' Mission's female employees.

The ultimate goal of the women's work was to transform North End immigrant homes along Canadian, preferably middle-class, lines. These regenerated homes would be beacons of order, temperance, reserve, and cleanliness in a sea of filth and immorality. The girls' clubs, the sewing, cooking, house-keeping, and kindergarten classes which the women led

were meant to educate immigrant girls on how to organize and run a middle-class Canadian home. Even the Fresh Air Camps, which the deaconesses managed in the summer, were meant to give immigrant children “a glimpse of true home life . . . a chance to escape the cramped close quarters they call home.”²⁵ Nellie McClung, in her introduction to the Mission’s Annual report of 1912, noted that the women’s work was a great influence on an immigrant home because concepts like cleanliness were passed on from the kindergarten to the child’s family.²⁶ Lillian Mason, in her report for May 1911, believed that the “seed sown” by her kindergarten work was bearing fruit in the improvements to both the children and their homes. As an example of this success, she related how Madeleine Foley, another kindergarten worker, had taken one little girl under her wing, a girl who, thanks to Foley’s influence, now came to class with “a fairly clean dress and hair.”²⁷ Foley had been a positive influence on the child and the child’s mother, since the girl now came to class every day in proper style.²⁸ In the eyes of deaconesses like Mason, this little girl, thanks to the work of the kindergarten, was on her way to becoming a respectable Canadian citizen.

The Deaconess Board of Management of All Peoples’ summarized its intentions by declaring that “the purpose [of the work] is to Canadianize and Christianize these future citizens our country.”²⁹ Nellie Malone, for example, thought the kindergarten would “unite for the common good the many people in this beloved Canada of ours.”³⁰ Annie Joynt thought her work with girls would “sow the seed of truth and virtue and loyalty for home and country,” thus making them “better citizens and Canadians.”³¹ Joynt believed that the native cultures of her pupils had a smaller portion of truth and virtue than Anglo-Canadian culture, a view consistent with contemporary ideas of Anglo-Saxon superiority.

Women at the Mission also believed it was their duty to share the truth of the gospel with the immigrants. Evangelism was the second major goal of the women’s work. The assimilation of an immigrant was not complete until he or she had converted to Methodist Christianity. Grace Tonkin believed that her classes, along with instilling higher ideals in her pupils, “led them to the One who is able to keep them from falling.”³² Maud Barlow hoped her work presented the “Christ-life” to the immigrants, so that they could then pattern their lives after Him and “realize the fullness of life.”³³ Agnes Allan claimed that:

All [our] work points to one end, the giving of life to Jesus. I believe that outside of the fact that in my classes we teach Christ, that every stitch learned in sewing, every ideal taught in kindergarten, every refinement shown, help in the foundation of character.³⁴

Thus, it appears that the women's duties, directed at the North End's immigrant population, had both social and religious ends. The service work the women engaged in, such as leading kindergartens, teaching sewing, cooking, and English-language classes, fit the Methodist's social "Canadianization" objective; while the Sunday School and Bible classes they led were part of the church's evangelistic thrust. They may have understood the church's twin goals of assimilation and evangelism to be fused by their work. Or, perhaps some saw social welfare as a vehicle for promoting Christian beliefs and values. The women's good deeds became a vehicle for spreading the Good News.

It is not easy, however, to determine exactly how the people to whom the women ministered reacted to their deeds and words. Nevertheless, Christina Simmons has argued that working-class women living near the Jost Mission in Halifax used its services to aid in their struggle for survival and self-improvement.³⁵ The same can very likely be said for the immigrants served by All Peoples' female employees. Some North End residents may have treated the Mission's kindergartens as a type of daycare centre. Many poorer people no doubt appreciated the second-hand clothes the Mission supplied free of charge during the winter. It is beyond the scope of this paper, however, to examine the influence the women's maternalistic ethic had in Canadianizing the immigrant's and their homes.

The nature and purpose of the tasks the women workers performed was consistent with their supposedly innate maternal qualities. Their calling to make the immigrant's homes into proper Canadian dwellings was based on the belief that their maternal aptitudes (despite their being single) allowed them special entrance into the newcomer's hearts and hearths. Methodist minister S.P. Rose paid tribute to Lillian Mason's kindergarten work by exclaiming that "she belongs to that company of universal mothers whose large hearts find room for any [in] need . . ."³⁶ The church was thus harnessing the women's inborn nurturing qualities in order to assimilate and evangelize the immigrants of the North End. The work was ultimately part of the Methodist Church's attempt to further the Kingdom of God in Canada and aid, according to Rev. Armstrong of Toronto, in the

“uplifting and ennobling of man.”³⁷ In the case of All Peoples’ female workers, the ennobling of man meant the Canadianization and Christianization of women, children, and the homes in which they lived.

The Mission’s work was structured along lines of gender. Women could teach the kindergarten and domestic science classes, or lead a group of older women in a Bible lesson, while preaching and administering was left to men such as Woodsworth or Walter Pavy.³⁸ There is some evidence, however, to suggest that Woodsworth thought that the church was not treating its female servants altogether fairly. The *Christian Guardian* published a letter by Alice Chown in November of 1911 which was highly critical of deaconesses themselves (“sentimental sops”), their superficial knowledge of sociology and the causes of poverty, and the pitiful amount of money the church paid them for their work.³⁹ Woodsworth’s reply to this letter, prompted by a deaconess at All Peoples’ Mission, was in agreement with Chown’s criticism’s.⁴⁰ He reserved his sharpest comments for the church’s inconsistency in requiring deaconesses to live on a small allowance while paying some of its male ministers comfortable salaries. A deaconess employed at All Peoples’ in 1913 received an allowance of ten dollars per month, while the senior minister of the Fort Rouge Methodist Church in Winnipeg was paid a salary of \$2500.⁴¹ In Woodsworth’s eyes, the practice that women should serve the church “merely ‘for the love of the work’” was hypocritically supported by those (men) who themselves enjoyed every comfort.⁴² Ultimately, however, it would be the church’s male hierarchy, living for the most part in middle-class comfort, who set out what of type of work the women performed and the payment they would receive for it. It seems that the church hoped the women workers at All Peoples’ Mission would be content to store up treasures in heaven while labouring for the Kingdom on earth.

A Manitoba Conference reporter in the *Christian Guardian* hoped that when the “books of nationhood are made up, Canada will not forget the women in the blue uniform [deaconesses] who toiled so patiently and kindly to bring light and order to the chaos of immigrant life.”⁴³ The women at All Peoples’ believed they were helping Canada and their church by working to assimilate and evangelize the residents of Winnipeg’s chaotic North End. Coming from Methodist, English-Canadian, middle-class backgrounds, they gave part of their lives to the church for a task they believed was right and important. They went about fulfilling that purpose in a way that was consistent with a maternalist ideology, an

ideology which held that a woman's intrinsic nurturing qualities made her the ideal candidate to solve the North End's domestic difficulties. Were this study to be pursued further, it would be appropriate to explore the holdings of the United Church Archives in Toronto in order to learn more biographical details of the women, and find out where their lives led them led after their time of service at All Peoples' Mission.

Endnotes

1. All People's Mission enjoyed a certain notoriety within the Canadian Methodist Conference immediately prior to the First World War as a result of the textbooks on immigration and urban problems written by its Superintendent Woodsworth. See J.S. Woodsworth, *Strangers Within Our Gates, or Coming Canadians* (Toronto: F.C. Stephenson, 1909), and *My Neighbour* (Toronto: Young People's Forward Movement for Missions, 1911). The standard study on the social gospel in Canada is Richard Allen's *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1973).
2. Linda Kealey has argued that maternal feminists who became involved in social and political activities were predominately middle-class, English-Canadian women. See Kealey's introduction in *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880-1920*, ed. Linda Kealey (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1975), 1-14. See also Wayne Roberts, "Rocking the Cradle for the World: The New Womanhood and Maternal Feminism, 1877-1914" in the same volume. Roberts notes a connection between maternal feminism and the "helping professions" such as nursing, teaching and charity work which were, he claims, designed to extend the character of female subordination from the family to the public sphere (15-45).
3. For an overview of the Mission's origins and development until 1914 see George N. Emery, "The Methodist Church and the 'European Foreigners' of Winnipeg: All Peoples' Mission, 1889-1914," *Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba Transactions, Third Series*, n.s. 28 (1971-72): 85-100.
4. John Thomas, "Servants of the Church: Canadian Methodist Deaconess Work, 1890-1926," *Canadian Historical Review* 65, No. 3 (1984): 371-395. Diane Haglund argues that maternal feminism was linked with the social gospel's notion of love and self-sacrifice to provide the ideological basis for the work of deaconesses. See Diane Haglund, "Side Road to Autonomy: The Diaconate prior to Church Union," *Women Work and Worship in the United Church of Canada* (Toronto, 1983), 206-227; and Phyllis D. Airhart, *Serving the Present*

Age: Revivalism, Progressivism, and the Methodist Tradition in Canada (Montreal: McGill-Queens University, 1992).

5. Thomas, 374.
6. “‘Not by Might Nor by Power but by My Spirit’: Women Workers in the United Church of Canada,” M.A. Thesis, University of Manitoba, 1986, 60-69.
7. Airhart, 76.
8. For a brief examination of the background of Methodist deaconesses in Canada, see Thomas, 383-385.
9. By my calculations, thirty-one women worked at All Peoples’ Mission between 1907-1914: this included eighteen deaconesses, nine kindergarten workers, and four who did other work. See Appendix I for a list of the women who worked at the Mission and their tenure. The table was constructed using information found in the All Peoples’ Box B, Woodsworth’s two textbooks, and issues of the *Christian Guardian*, 1907-1914. Based on a reading of their surnames, the women appear to have been English Canadian, except for A. Kochellea, who was a Polish woman. I was unable to determine whether or not she too was a deaconess, or a local women taken on by the Mission.
10. *Christian Guardian*, 22 May 1907 and 19 May 1909. Deaconesses were stationed “in an arbitrary fashion by the Deaconess Board of Management,” Hall, 51.
11. Rosemary R. Gagan, *A Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881-1925* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University, 1992), 60.
12. Hall, 49; Thomas, 383. In 1910 Woodsworth received several letters from a Methodist minister in British Columbia suggesting a certain Susie Kometz as a potential deaconess. She herself finally responded and admitted that she did not have enough money to go the National Training School. The course of training at the School was eight months until 1910 when it was increased to two years. The only hint I found of the background of a kindergarten worker at the Mission was a reference in the *Christian Guardian* to the appointment of Nellie Malone, “a recent graduate of the Ottawa school.”
13. Hall, 125.
14. “Deaconess Work,” *Christian Guardian*, 2 March 1910 and 19 February 1913.

15. Thomas has suggested that since some women entered the order above the median age of marriage, the diaconate may have been for them a viable alternative to spinsterhood (384).
16. This idea was first discussed by Marta Danlewycz with regards to nuns in Quebec (*Taking the Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood, and Spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840-1920*, eds. Paul-Andre Linteau, Alison Prentice, and William Westfall [Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987], 84).
17. "Practical Christianity: Report of All Peoples' Mission, 1910-11," United Church Archives, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario at the University of Winnipeg, All Peoples' Mission papers, Box B, File 1 (hereafter UCA BB F1). It is interesting to note that women only needed to have warm mother *hearts* not to be biological mothers.
18. In this way the work of the women employed at All People's was remarkably similar to the female church workers at the Jost Mission in Halifax. See Christina Simmon, "Helping the Poorer Sisters: The Women of the Jost Mission, Halifax, 1905-1945," *Acadiensis* 14, No. 1 (Autumn 1984): 3-27. A deaconess at All Peoples' worked mainly with school-age girls and older women, while a kindergarten worker spent most of her time with pre-school aged children.
19. For a brief description of social conditions in Winnipeg's North End prior to the First World War see Alan F.J. Artibise, "Divided City: The Immigrant in Winnipeg Society, 1887-1921," in *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban History*, eds. Alan F.J. Artibise and Gilbert A. Stetler (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), 300-336.
20. Woodsworth, *Strangers*, 330; and *Christian Guardian*, 6 November 1907.
21. Anonymous Deaconess, *Christian Guardian*, 14 October 1908.
22. See Mariana Valverde's *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992), for an analysis of the mentality behind the drive for purity and cleanliness in urban Canada.
23. S.P. Rose, "The Raw Material of Canadian Citizenship," *Christian Guardian*, 19 August 1908.
24. J.W. Aikens, "The Home in Relation to Social Problems," *Christian Guardian*, 5 October 1910.
25. P. Smith, "Fresh Air Work in Winnipeg," *Christian Guardian*, 1 September 1909.

26. "Organized Helpfulness: Report of All Peoples' Mission, 1911-12," UCA APM BB F1.
27. L. Mason, Sutherland Avenue Kindergarten report, May 1911, UCA APM BB F11 and 12.
28. Mariana Valverde has noted that the women's work at the Methodist's Fred Victor Mission in Toronto was also aimed at families or homes, with girls being used "as a kind of fifth column for respectability and proper English cooking" (144).
29. Journal of the Methodist General Conference, 1910, 180.
30. Nellie Malone Report: Stella Avenue kindergarten, 1911, UCA APM BB F12.
31. Annie Joynt, Report: Sutherland Avenue girls work, 1910, UCA APM BB F11.
32. Grace Tonkin, Report: girls work; Woodsworth, *Strangers*, 334.
33. UCA APM BB F12.
34. UCA APM BB F12.
35. Simmons, 27.
36. S.P. Rose, "A Kindergarten Pilgrimage," *Christian Guardian*, 8 April 1908.
37. Rev. Armstrong, "Deaconess Work: Commencement Sermon," *Christian Guardian*, 11 May 1911.
38. See Woodsworth's reports in UCA BB F2 for his activities in 1907-08.
39. Alice Chown, "Some Criticisms of the Deaconess Movement." *Christian Guardian*, 15 November 1911.
40. J.S. Woodsworth, "The Deaconess Work," *Christian Guardian*, 29 November 1911. He was also concerned about the lack of professional social science training a deaconess received at the Training School.
41. Minutes of the Manitoba Methodist Conference, 1909, 68. *Christian Guardian*, 17 January 1912. Some months when the Mission's finances were tight, the women workers were not paid. When this occurred the women had to rely on the generosity of family and friends to survive. Woodsworth's report of October 1907, UCA APM BB F2.
42. Woodsworth, *Christian Guardian*, 29 November 1911.

43. "Manitoba Conference: Report," *Christian Guardian*, 1 November 1911.

Appendix I

Women Workers: 1906-1914¹

Deaconesses

<i>Name</i>	<i>Tenure</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Branch</i>
Adair, Marion	1906-08	Deaconess	Stella
Allen, Agnes	1906-09;13-14	Deaconess Deac. Superintendent	Stella
Barlow, Maud	1909-10	Girls Worker	Sutherland
Bradley, Florence	1912-14	Girls worker	Stella
Dickenson, Maud	1911-14	Girls worker	Sutherland
Hallum, Margaret	1909-14	Polish work	Burrows
Hart, Wilberta	1908-09	Girls worker	Sutherland
Hartley, Martha	1907-14	KGD Canvasser Boys work/KGD Assistant	Sutherland
Irwin, Annie	1906-09	Deac. Superintendent	Deac. home
Joynt, Annis	1909-10	Girls work English MM	Sutherland & Maple
Lee, Eva ²	1911	uncertain	
Malone, Nellie	1909-11	KGD Directress Y.P. Society	Stella
Milliken, Lillian	1910-14	KGD Canvasser ('11) Supply Room/Asst. KGD ('12)	Sutherland
Scrigley, Evalyn	1909-11	Boys work Night School/German MM	Stella
Sherwood, Amy	1910-11	Adult worker Friendly visitor/German	Stella
Smith, Priscilla	1907-12	Nurse Superintendent ('10) Deac. Home	
Tonkin, Grace	1906-11	Girls Worker	Stella
Young, Louise ³	1909	uncertain	

¹KGD denotes kindergarten; MM indicates mothers' meeting.

²This woman does not appear in any of the All Peoples' Mission papers.

³This woman does not appear in any of the All Peoples' Mission papers.

Kindergarten Workers and Others

Name	Tenure	Occupation	Branch
Bawden, Maud	1912-1	KGD Assistent	Stella
Bedford, Olive	1912-14	KGD Canvasser	Stella
Blanchard, E.L.	1907-10	KGD Assistent	Stella
Curtis, Mabel	1911-14	Girls worker	Stella
Foley, Madeline	1911-13	KGD Canvasser Polish M.M. Assist Tonkin, A.C. Visitor Sec. ('12) Visitor ('13)	Burrows and Stella
Hall, Bella	1912-13	Women's Worker Head worker	Stella
James, Hilda	1907-14	KGD Assistent KGD Directress ('11)	Sutherland Stella
Kochella, A.	1907-08	Bible Woman	Stella
Lyons, Ms	1910	KGD Assistent	
Mason, Lillian S.	1907-14	KGD Directress	Sutherland
Robinson, Lottie	1914	Canvasser	Stella
Wigle, C.V.	1907-08	KGD Directress	Stella
Woodsworth, Edith	1911	KGD Assistent	Stella