A Time God Called Me To Respond

(A talk given at a World Day of Prayer service, March 1, 1996)

By Ruth Basom

 When I was a young woman, married to a minister, I expected calls from God, and I responded when they came—to teach in the Sunday School, visit the sick, and in general to help my husband every way I could to fulfill his ministry, *his* call from God.

 But when a member of our church asked me to join the newly-forming League of Women Voters in our city, it did not at first seem to me to be a call from God. I had no background in political matters and no community organization skills to offer. I did not think God would ask me to do something for which I was so ill-prepared. However, I did agree to think about it. My friend kept nudging me, and gradually I came to feel that God, too, was nudging me.

 The time was in the mid 1940s, and I, like everyone else, was appalled by the accounts we were getting of the German Concentration Camps. How could a country like Germany, steeped in Christianity for centuries and home to great theologians, have succumbed to the grotesque ideas of Hitler?

 I recall seeing a picture by a German artist who was trying to arouse people to the evils of Nazism. His painting showed a German family gathered about a piano singing by candlelight in a room decorated for Christmas. I wish I could recall exactly what it was about the picture which placed it unmistakably in the time of the Nazi terror. Perhaps there was a photograph of Hitler on the wall or a view through a window of storm troopers rounding up Jews. Whatever it was, it conveyed a bitter irony; for the title of the picture was, “Silent Night, Holy Night.” When I read that title, chills ran up my spine. How could Christian piety and tolerance for Hitler exist in the same person, the same society? If we in America did not participate in the political process might we, too, let an evil leader seduce us? I began to have serious thoughts about the incompatibility of political apathy and true Christian piety.

 So I *did* join the League of Women Voters, and I have been a member ever since, working within it to inform people in a nonpartisan way about those issues which are important if we are to maintain a democratic and humane society.

 Fifty years ago, was it God who called me to this particular effort? I believe that it was.