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Bringing Justice and Beauty Together in Ministry

In late October and early November 2008, our three Michigan District women pastors were part of a Sustaining Pastoral Excellence experience which took them to New Zealand.

Debbie Eisenbise, Anita Smith Buckwalter and Frances Townsend, along with pastors *Kay Gaier, Marilyn Lerch and Mary Cline Detrick*, have been exploring this pressing issue for women in ministry. Their trip, and study, is being funded by a Lilly Endowment grant through our Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership.

“As pastors who assist our people in terms of pastoral-care needs, we find that what feeds us and what assists us in our work is beauty.” Debbie told a reporter for the Kalamazoo Gazette. “The idea that justice and beauty are connected in important ways challenged our thinking,” said *Linda Timmons*, who along with her husband *Glenn*, administer the Lilly grant for the Church of the Brethren.

New Zealand was chosen because of its renowned beauty, and also because it was the first country in the world to apologize to its indigenous people, the Maoris, for past injustices. Maori art impressed the group. The Maori people have become Christians over the past 150 years. Their art reminded the women of how Christianity is a faith that transcends cultures.

“I love the way in which they bring together different cultures in the celebration of the faith, how they encourage people to not just get along, but to celebrate their particular cultures in the religious community,” Debbie said.

These six pastors will continue their work and study over the next year and present the results to the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence group in December 2009.

They might be willing to talk to your group about this in the meantime.

We applaud their efforts, as we, too, look for bringing justice and beauty together in ministry.