

Ruling Elder Visits--

Woman Elected by Presbytery

FAIRBANKS—Ruling Elder Lois H. Stair—the first woman to be elected Moderator of the United Presbyterian Church—stopped here last week on her way to Barrow for a visit.

With her were Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Corbett (he is Associate Synod Executive of the Washington-Alaska Synod) and Richard Madden, pastor of the United Presbyterian Church at Palmer.

It is traditional, Mrs. Stair said, for the moderator to “interpret the work of the church around the world to the local people.” Her visit here, she said, will enable her to tell others about Alaska.

She was particularly interested in visiting with Joe Upickson of the Arctic Slope area, she said, because the Presbyterian church, through a new committee called the Committee for Self-Development of People, had provided funds to help the people of that area work towards settlement of the land claims and provide for the development of schools in that area.

The money was given, she said, without “any restrictions” and this act of giving had been somewhat controversial. “It’s an experimental kind of thing,” she explained, a “matter of trusting new people to make their own decisions.”

She said, “Our church has an increased interest in the self-development of people where they live. We want them to tell us about their needs and how

the church should serve them in their own communities, instead of the old style of telling people with different traditions to accept our ideas, along with the Christian faith.”

She came to Alaska, she said, at the request of a woman from Lawrence Island who attended the general assembly in the Lower 48.

The “theory in our church is that we want to hear the voices of people who have not been heard before,” she said. This accounts for the increased involvement of youth and women in the decision making process, she said.

The position of moderator is a temporary one-year position, she said, and it took her five years to make up her mind that she could do it “because it meant the schedule of our family has to depend on where I’m going.”

Five years ago, when she was on the national nominating committee, she was asked if she would consider taking the position at some later date when a woman would be asked to serve.

Now, she said, her husband does the cooking and writes to his mother—things that she formerly did.

“He has always said that the most marvelous appliance in the house was the laundry basket,” she said, because “you put things in and they get back in the drawers,” folded and clean.

That doesn’t happen this year, she said.

On her last trip she was gone three weeks.

How does this affect her family?

Her sons, Ralph, Jr., and Stuart Randall, are 26 and 23. If they were young and at home, she wouldn’t be able to be moderator, she said. And her husband Ralph—president and general manager of the General Casting Corporation, Waukesha is “very supportive.”

By the time her year in office is over she will have visited almost every state in the union, but she is not, she said, going overseas.