



Photo by Herb Slodounik

ERA backer Cluney John with two-year-old son Danny.

**Supporter**



# believes ERA won't go away

Outside, temperatures hovering around the zero degree-mark reduced the snow in the Westminster Presbyterian Church parking lot to a powdery consistency, scattering in all directions with the kick of a foot.

The snow's condition was comparable to that of the Equal Rights Amendment, the subject of a meeting one winter night in the church basement.

Some 25 supporters heard the familiar grim news: chances for passage in Illinois, and by implication the nation, were slim.

But instead of cursing a backward society or seeking scapegoats, the men and women broke into small groups to plot strategy for the final assault.

It was as if Gen. Robert E. Lee, prior to entering the Appomattox courthouse, prepared plans for an invasion of Chicago.

Days later, Cluney John sits in her dining room and between patient dealings with her 2-year-old son, explains the feelings present that night.

"Frankly, it's just the essential nature of the amendment," she says of the persistent optimism of the supporter.

"It is based on our feeling of an overriding need for changes in the laws."

Mrs. John, a former teacher who describes herself without hesitation as a housewife, is an admitted latecomer to the cause.

"I really did very little until about eight or 10 months ago," she relates. "I guess I had been one of the group that is very large — the quiet supporters of ERA."

A speech by Sonja Johnson, a Mormon who was booted from her church over ERA, fired Mrs. John's involvement.

"I was impressed with her integrity and her feelings," she remembers.

An active member of St. Thomas Catholic Church, Mrs. John found her own sense of practical religion touched.

"The Catholic Church has a strong social justice tradition, and to me the amendment is consistent with fulfillment of that tradition," she says.

Yet she acknowledged that many of her fellow Central Illinois Catholics would not share that view.

Unfairly, perhaps, the church is perceived by many to be a leading opponent of ERA ratification.

## Bob Sampson Off the Beat.



"The church in the country as a whole has taken the lead," she says, hoping to correct what she terms an "unfortunate misconception."

"In some places, it's not unheard of for the church to be in the lead.

"But here, I am in a minority. The overriding majority of Catholics in this area perceive ERA as something they're afraid of."

But if Mrs. John is in a minority, she likes the company.

"The more I attended ERA meetings, I saw the tremendous diversity of the people working for ERA," she says.

"They were not the off-the-wall stereotypes you might expect. I met nuns, widows, young working women, students and housewives, like myself."

From this diversity came another explanation for the dogged optimism visible that night in the Westminster church basement.

"In a way, this has been very inspiring for me," she explains. "You meet people like Nellie Winick, women who are 50 years older than I am."

"They've worked for women's suffrage and then the ERA all these years and they are not cynical, bitter people."

"They realize it takes a while to get things done."

If they can persevere, so can others. While she is not ready to concede defeat, Mrs. John admits the chances for ERA ratification could be better.

"The (June 1982) deadline will come and go. Perhaps we will have to bring it up again later. There's nothing that says we can't."

"The amendment is a good idea," she says. "Perhaps its time has not come."

But she and the others who planned strategy that night aren't going to idly wait for events to flow their way.

"The people who believe in it will continue to work until they see it accomplished," she promises.

"It's something that won't go away."