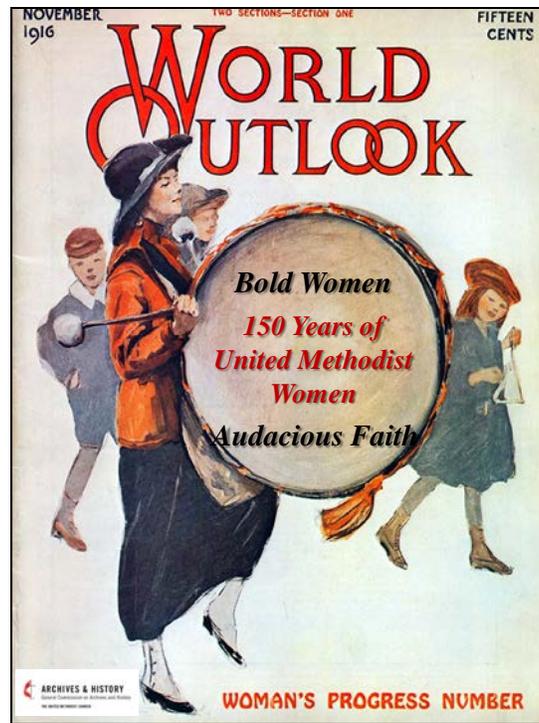


Slide 1



Slide 2

A Divine Call to Action

Source: Jenny Fowler Willing, "What American Women Do Next?" *Zion's Herald* (26 May 1870): 242.

"The first generation of American women helped at the work of conquering homes from the wilderness, and laying the foundations of the New World. There were giantesses of energy and patient endurance in those days as well as in the later time, when the base stones of the Great Republic were laid. It would be impossible to estimate the part of the women of our day have borne in the Herculean labor of clearing the land of 'the sum of villainies' [slavery].

Women have measureless energy. Their moral sentiments, usually active and earnest, crowd them to make the world better. *Only God knows the bitterness of the secret cry that goes up from the heart of thousands of women...*

The question is fairly before us. What shall American women do next? Fidgety conservatives may flutter and worry. It is quite too late to turn women back to their frizzling and ruffling and gossip. The spirit of work has been raised: it cannot be laid [aside] by frowns, scolding, or candies. *The role of [the] pretty plaything is an end. Work is the word, and work it must be...* Now that the peril is past [Civil War], it is not so easy to hush them down to the parlor warblings and nursery lyrics ...

The question that stir the world's pulses now are moral questions ... she [the church] needs every help she can conscript. She cannot afford to dispense with one iota of the energies of her women. Let her face this matter fairly. Let her open avenues for the capabilities of women. Let utilize their energy ... Christian men and women may do far greater work for the Master than they have ever yet dream of. It is high time they awake to understand this ... Infinite resource are within our grasp. In the name of God, let us lay hold of every right thing that has the power in it, and use it to conquer the world for our King, even Jesus."

Methodist Experience in America Source Book, Volume 2, pp. 364-365


ARCHIVES & HISTORY
METHODIST CHURCH
www.methodist.org

[Jennie Fowler Willing](#) became a major force in the establishment and growth of the Methodist Episcopal Church's Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. Willing was born in Ontario, Canada, in 1834. Later she married an itinerant Methodist preacher named William Crossgrove Willing. Together they would serve God and the church as partners in ministry. William served as a clergy person in the Rock River Annual Conference located in Illinois. In 1873, William presided over the Joliet district as the district superintendent when Jennie received a local preacher's license and was appointed to pastor a conference mission church. Thus began one of the great leadership stories in the history of Methodism.

Jennie had a gift for organizing coupled with unbounding energy. These gifts came to fruition with her contributions to organize and then lead the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society as the first Corresponding Secretary (think General Secretary in today's church structure) in 1869. She held the office from 1869 to 1883. The job was not for the faint of heart. Her first task was to organize auxiliary societies, later geographic branches, from Ohio to the West Coast. Part of her success came through the establishment of the *Heathen's Woman's Friend* publication where she informed the readers of the ongoing work while building membership and influencing future leaders.

Willing became an early leader in temperance work. While teaching at Illinois Wesleyan College she became part of a local temperance crusade. From there Jennie went on to organize the national Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Her organizational skills did not end there when called upon one more time when the Woman's Home Missionary Society formed in 1884.

References:

Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient*, pp. 165-166.

Images: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jennie_Fowler_Willing

Slide 3

Mothers of Methodism

Susanna Wesley



- Susanna was born January 20, 1669, as the 25th and last child in the Annesley family. She would later give birth to 19 children including John and Charles Wesley.
- Susanna supported the ministry Thomas Maxfield as the first Methodist lay preacher.
- Susanna's emphasis upon education is reflected in Methodism's many schools, colleges and seminaries.
- Susanna's deeply pious spirit is reflected in our denominational general rules.
- Susanna's missionary spirit in giving her sons to Georgia set the stage for Methodism's future missionary frontiers.

Susanna Wesley

ARCHIVES & HISTORY
The Church of the Nazarene

There is little doubt as to the influence Susanna Wesley continues to have within United Methodism. History tells us despite numerous setbacks and struggles with home and health issues she would help shape the ministry of John and Charles Wesley till her death at seventy-three years old. Born on January 20, 1669, to the Reverend Samuel Annesley and his wife, Susanna was the 25th and last child in the family. She would later give birth to nineteen children herself. Historians agree that Susanna was her father's favorite child and supported her decisions including the decision to leave the nonconformist church, which Annesley was a well-known leader, in order to join the Anglican Church.

Her life with husband Samuel had many ups and downs for a variety of reasons. But her dedication to the church and educating the Wesley children would stand as a testament to her enduring faith. Such an example can be found in her reading handpicked sermons in the parsonage/manse as religious instruction to her children. The readings eventually expanded to include approximately two hundred attendees. Later in life Susanna would support Thomas Maxfield as the first lay preacher despite John's initial disapproval which even today lay preachers are still used in United Methodist Church pulpits.

Dr. Frederick Maser points out other contributions by Susanna that are still part of the Methodist fabric. He writes, "Susanna Wesley influenced Methodism in many ways. Her orderly mind is reflected through her son John in its organization and discipline. Her deeply pious spirit is reflected in its general rules, and her emphasis upon education is reflected in its many schools and colleges. Her missionary spirit in giving her sons to Georgia is reflected in Methodism's far flung missionary frontiers, and her personal prayer life is reflected in its devotional literature."

References:

Maser, Frederick E. *Susanna Wesley*. Madison: General Commission on Archives and History, 1987

Image: General Commission on Archives and History Photograph Collection

Slide 4

Mothers of Methodism Barbara Ruckle Heck



- Heck was born in 1734 at Ruckle Hill, Ballygarrane, Limerick, Ireland.
- Heck family were part of Palatine German refugees that migrated to Ireland and later New York City to escape persecution.
- Heck confronted fellow Palatine Methodists their backsliding faith after arriving in NYC. Case in point is a confrontation with Philip Embury, at a card game.
- Embury's rekindled faith resulted in building the first Methodist meeting house in 1768.
- Heck eventually moved to Canada with her husband Paul where they help to establish Canadian Methodism.

If Susanna Wesley is considered the Mother of Global Methodism then Methodist Barbara Heck should be considered the Mother of New World Methodism. We often forget the pivotal work Barbara did to start and maintain the nascent Methodist movement both in Canada and the United States. If it were not for her dedication and iron resolution for Methodism to begin and flourish in her new home contemporary Methodism may have a completely different story to tell.

In 1734, Barbara entered this world at Ruckle Hill, Ballygarrane, Limerick, Ireland. Her family was part of the Palatine German refugees who migrated to Ireland to escape persecution. Other Palatine Germans settled in New York City at the same time. Hence it comes as no surprise they would also immigrate to New York City on August 11, 1760.

Many of her coworker Methodists lost their zealous faith upon arriving in the new world. This would not stand if Heck had anything to do with it as Philip Embury soon found out. As the story goes she interrupted Embury's card game, grabbed the deck and through the cards into the fireplace. This, in turn, rekindled Embury's faith and as a result Methodism took root in the city. By 1768, the Methodists built their first meeting house on John Street.

Later the Barbara and her husband moved to the Lake Champlain area and established a Methodist class. From there they fled to Canada during the American Revolution to escape persecution once more and started Methodist work throughout Canada. This work included the founding of the first class meeting in Upper Canada. She would pass on to her eternal reward in 1804.

References:

Encyclopedia of World Methodism, Volume 1 (1972), s.v. "Heck, Barbara Ruckle," by Arthur Bruce Moss

Image from Board of Higher Education and Ministry Collection, General Commission on Archives and History

Organized for Mission

- *Methodist Episcopal Church*
- **1869** Woman's Foreign Missionary Society
- **1880** Women's Home Missionary Society
- **1904** Ladies Aid Society
- **1921** Wesleyan Service Guild



- *Methodist Episcopal Church, South*
- **1878** Woman's Foreign Missionary Society
- **1890** Woman's Home Missionary Society
- **1910** Woman's Missionary Council



Belle Harris Bennett

- *Methodist Protestant Church*
- **1879** Woman's Foreign Missionary Society
- **1893** Woman's Home Missionary Society



Elizabeth Guthrie: 1st Methodist Protestant Church Woman Missionary

ARCHIVES & HISTORY
Board of Commissioners on Archives and Records
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Methodist Episcopal Church (1784-1939)

WOMAN'S FOREIGN MISSIONARY SOCIETY 1869/1872-1939

Founded in **1869**, and recognized by General Conference in **1872**, this society evolved in an atmosphere of struggle over "women's rights," particularly for higher education and professional positions for women. Women felt a spontaneous commitment to "extend the Gospel to women by women." Branches of the society were established to encourage young women and financially support them in medical and teaching positions in foreign fields. The WFMS functioned as a cooperating organization alongside the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

WOMAN'S HOME MISSIONARY SOCIETY 1880-1939

Founded in **1880**, this society came into existence to meet the needs of women and young children in rapidly growing urban areas and among the underprivileged in the nation. An early emphasis was placed on the establishment of "neighborhood houses" that endeavored to give

working young women "a home away from home." Continued interest in women and young children led the society to ministry among many nationalities through the establishment of hospitals, clinics, orphanages and other social service programs. The WHMS functioned as a cooperating organization alongside the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. **Methodist Episcopal Church, South (1844-1939)**

Methodist Episcopal Church, South (1844-1939)

WOMAN'S FOREIGN MISSIONARY SOCIETY 1894-1910

This society was known as the Woman's Missionary Society from **1878** until **1894**, when it was renamed. The objects of this society were to enlist and to unite the efforts of women and children in sending the gospel to women and children in foreign lands, on our border, and among the Indian tribes of the United States, through the agency of female missionaries, teachers, physicians, and Bible readers. These persons were subject to the appointing power of the Bishop having charge of the mission field in which they labored. The work was accomplished by societies organized within each charge, and Conference Societies in each Conference, and were controlled by an executive body known as *The Woman's Board of Foreign Missions*.

WOMAN'S PARSONAGE AND HOME MISSION SOCIETY 1890-1898

(Board of Church Extension of the MECS)

In **1890**, the Woman's Department of the Board of Church Extension became known as the **Woman's Parsonage and Home Mission Society** (also referred to generically in subsequent sections of the MECS Discipline as the Woman's Department). The object of this society was to unite the efforts of Christian women and children in the collection of funds by private effort, personal solicitation, membership fees, donations, devises and bequests, for procuring homes for itinerant preachers, and otherwise aiding the cause of Christ. The funds collected by this organization were appropriated by its Central Committee; however, all funds appropriated to parsonages were to be disbursed by the General and Conference Boards of Church Extension, for the objects specified, and the places designated by the society, but subject to approval by the Board making such disbursement. The officers consisted of a president, a general secretary, a general treasurer, and nine managers; these constituted a Central Committee. There were also a secretary and a treasurer for each Annual Conference and a District Secretary for each Presiding Elder's District. (This is representative of the board at its inception. Over the course of years, the total number of officers/managers may have varied slightly; consult the Discipline.) The General Secretary conducted the correspondence and furnished reports to the Secretary of the General Board when necessary. The secretary of this department for each Annual Conference was responsible for organizing auxiliary societies in the various charges and submitted quarterly reports to the General Secretary of the department as well as to the Conference Society.

WOMAN'S HOME MISSION SOCIETY 1898-1910

In **1898**, the Woman's Parsonage and Home Mission Society was renamed and became independent of the Board of Church Extension. Known as the **Woman's Home Mission Society**, its object was to enlist and organize Christian women and children in securing homes for itinerant preachers; in providing religious instruction for the neglected and destitute; and in otherwise aiding the cause of Christ. The funds of the society were derived from membership dues, special contributions at meetings appointed in the interest of the society, mite boxes, donation, devises, bequests, or other approved means, as well as the creation of loan funds. This society was under the supervision and direction of women, an executive body known as *The Woman's Board of Home Missions*.

WOMAN'S MISSIONARY COUNCIL 1910-1939

As part of the major reorganization of missions by the **1910** General Conference, the connectional Woman's Foreign Missionary Society and Woman's Home Missionary Society were merged to become the *Woman's Missionary Council*, whose administrators and work (for women and children) were integrated into the structure of the Board. It was through this Council that the women of the MECS were to conduct missionary work. The Woman's Missionary Council had a *Home Department and a Foreign Department* from 1910 until 1914. It was responsible for the development of missionary work among women and children in accordance with the policy of the Board of Missions. This Council consisted of a president, four vice-presidents, two or more secretaries, two recording secretaries, and the corresponding secretary of both the Woman's Foreign and Home Mission Societies of each Annual Conference. The secretaries of the Board of Missions, assistant treasurer, and the women who were members of the Board were ex officio members of the Woman's Missionary Council. (This is representative of the board at its inception. Over the course of years, the total number of officers/managers/members may have varied slightly; consult the Discipline.) The Council held annual meetings to hear reports of the work in all fields, receive appropriations and plans from the Board of Missions, to arrange the details of the appropriations, and to consecrate the women who were accepted for service. The Council aimed to enlarge the membership of these societies, to increase the collections, and to further the work of missionary education among women and children. The Council made its own by-laws and provided a constitution and bylaws for Conference and Auxiliary Societies in harmony with the constitution of the Board of Missions.

Methodist Protestant Church 1830-1939

WOMAN'S FOREIGN MISSIONARY SOCIETY 1879-1924

This society was organized in Pittsburgh in **1879**, and was recognized by General Conference in **1880** as a permanent agency. This society worked autonomously, but in cooperation with and under advisory supervision of, the Board of Missions. This society existed for the purpose of uniting the women of the MPC in efforts to promote and to extend the organized work of missions, and in educating and Christianizing women and girls by sending missionaries, Bible readers, and teachers to foreign lands, and by establishing and controlling schools and homes. It was recommended that branch societies were to be organized in all MPC Annual Conferences and auxiliaries in all MPC stations, circuits, and missions, wherever practicable.

WOMAN'S HOME MISSIONARY SOCIETY 1893-1928
(Later also called the Woman's Board of Home Missions)

Organized in **1893**, this society was recognized by General Conference in **1896**. The objects of this society were to enlist the women and children who were connected with MPC congregations throughout the United States in organized efforts on behalf those who were destitute of Gospel privileges. The society could cooperate with other agencies of the Church in educational and home missionary work. The organization consisted of a General Executive board, conference societies and auxiliary societies, and an Executive Committee appointed by General Conference. This society acted in harmony with, and under the advisory supervision of, the Board of Home Missions, reserving the right of controlling its own funds.

UNION BOARD OF FOREIGN MISSIONARY ADMINISTRATION 1924-1928

In **1924**, this agency was created by the merger of the Board of Foreign Missions and the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. Its headquarters was in Pittsburgh. The Union board had authority to make its own rules and regulations, to establish missions in foreign lands, employ missionaries and organizers, fix salaries, supervise their work, and change and remove them as the interests of the work may have demanded, provided no action was taken which violated contracts already entered into by the Board and the Society.

BOARD OF MISSIONS (1928-1939)

In **1928**, this board was created by the merger of the Union Board of Foreign Missionary Administration, the Board of Home Missions, and the Woman's Home Missionary Society. The purpose of this board was the publication and extension of the Gospel of Jesus Christ on the continent of North America and in foreign lands, subject to the authority and direction of the General Conference of the MPC, and in accordance with the authorized standards and usages of the MPC by the employment and support of ministers and missionaries, by the erection of church edifices, by the establishment and support of schools for secular and religious training and by other lawful and appropriate means. Members of the board were to be ten men (6 of which were to be ministers and ten women. The Board had supervisory authority over the Women's Missionary branches and auxiliaries.

Resource:

Mission Agency Histories, History of the Missionary Agencies in the United Methodist Tradition 1819-Present, General Commission on Archives and History, 1995
Images from General Commission on Archives and History Photograph Collection

Slide 6

Organized for Mission



Church of the United Brethren

- 1875 Women's Missionary Association
- 1909 WMA folded into General Board of Missions

Evangelical Association

- 1883 Woman's Missionary Society (Local Church Level Only)

United Evangelical Church

- 1894 Woman's Home & Foreign Missionary Society



Evangelical Church

- 1922 The Woman's Missionary Society of The Evangelical Church

Methodist Church

- 1939 Woman's Society of Christian Service

Evangelical United Brethren Church

- 1946 Women's Society of World Service



The United Methodist Church

- 1968 Women's Division, General Board of Global Ministries

ARCHIVES & HISTORY

CHURCH OF THE UNITED BRETHREN IN CHRIST 1800-1946

WOMAN'S MISSIONARY ASSOCIATION 1875-1946

The purpose of this association was to enrich the spiritual lives of women and girls of the Church. The goals were to engage and unite their efforts in sending missionaries into the foreign and domestic fields of the church, and supporting them and other laborers in said mission fields. However, its operations were almost exclusively overseas. The society's object was to awaken an interest among women on behalf of Christian missions, and to raise funds for their support. The organization of this society consisted of a board of managers, an executive committee, and branch and local associations, organized under the constitution. Through sound literature, wise teaching techniques, and patient cultivation, it produced a broad missionary enthusiasm.

EVANGELICAL ASSOCIATION 1807-1922

WOMAN'S MISSIONARY SOCIETY 1880/1884-1922

(Missionary Society of the Evangelical Association)

In **1880**, after petitioning the Board of Missions, approval was voted for the creation of Woman's Missionary Societies. In the next few years, the societies which were scattered among various states declared that they should be gathered under a constitution and Board (subordinate to the general Board) of their own. General Conference, in **1884**, approved an appeal and ratified the constitution of the Woman's Missionary Society. The Woman's Missionary Society was auxiliary to the parent Missionary Society and was under the supervision of the general Board of Missions. The WMS submitted its proceedings annually to the Board for examination and approval and sent reports to the corresponding secretary and treasurer. As of **1913**, this society was granted the privilege of having its own constitution and by-laws, with officers for the prosecution of its work. It had the power to open, establish, and direct special lines of missionary work with the consent and approval of the Board of Missions. All its operations were under the supervision of the Board.

UNITED EVANGELICAL CHURCH 1894-1922

WOMAN'S HOME AND FOREIGN MISSIONARY SOCIETY 1894/1895-1922?

(Missionary Society of the United Evangelical Church)

This society had been organized in **1880** under the Evangelical Association as the Woman's Missionary Society, prior to the division of the denomination. It functioned (in both the EA and the UE Church) as an auxiliary to the general Missionary Society. It met for the first time as an agency of the UE Church on September 12, **1895**. With the creation of the United Evangelical Church, this women's movement became the Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary Society. Under the UE Church, the untiring efforts of WMS members contributed to the growing desire for missionary operations in foreign lands during the period when the Missionary Society was not financially able to support foreign mission work. The interest in foreign missions served as a stimulus for interest in home missions. The WMS served as a spiritual force; as an agency for training Christian forces, especially among women and children; as a disseminator of missionary intelligence through the publication of missionary literature; and as a gatherer of funds.

EVANGELICAL CHURCH 1922-1946

WOMAN'S MISSIONARY SOCIETY 1922-1946

(Missionary Society of the Evangelical Church) 1922-1930

(Department of the Board of Missions of the Evangelical Church) 1930-1946

The purpose of the Woman's Missionary Society was to engage the earnest, sympathetic, and intelligent cooperation of the women throughout the Church in aiding the missionary enterprise of the EC through the dissemination of missionary information, the promotion of mission study, the enlistment in intercessory prayer, the cultivation of a missionary spirit in the home and the Church, and the gathering of missionary funds. In **1930**, the WMS, formerly an auxiliary, became

a department of the Board of Missions to permit centralization of denominational missionary administration within the Board.

METHODIST CHURCH 1939-1968

WOMEN'S DIVISION OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE

(Board of Missions and Church Extension of The Methodist Church)

The purpose of this division was to develop and maintain Christian work among women and children at home and abroad; to cultivate Christian family life; to enlist and organize the efforts of Christian women, young people, and children in behalf of native and foreign groups, needy childhood, and community welfare; to assist in the promotion of a missionary spirit throughout the Church; to select, train, and maintain Christian workers; to cooperate with the local church in its responsibilities, and to seek fellowship with Christian women of this and other lands in establishing a Christian social order around the world.

EVANGELICAL UNITED BRETHREN CHURCH 1946-1968

BOARD OF MISSIONS 1946-1966

DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN'S SERVICE/WOMEN'S SOCIETY OF WORLD SERVICE 1946-1968

(Board of Missions of the EUB Church)

This department was composed of the Women's Council of the Women's Society of World Service. It was responsible for administering the affairs of the WSWS of the Board of Missions. The purpose of the **Women's Society of World Service** was to unite all the women of the EUB Church to make Christ known throughout the world, to deepen the spiritual life of each of its members, to develop a sense of personal responsibility for the whole task of the Church, and to secure funds through systematic means for the maintenance of the missionary work of the EUB church.

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH 1968 – Present

The Women's Division 1968-2012

United Methodist Women

UMW is actively engaged in fulfilling the mission of Christ and the Church and interprets the purpose of United Methodist Women. With continuing awareness of the concerns and responsibilities of the Church in today's world, this division functions as an advocate for the oppressed and dispossessed with special attention to the needs of women and children. It works to build a supportive community among women, engage in activities which foster growth in Christian faith, mission education, and Christian social involvement throughout the organization.

Resource:

Mission Agency Histories, History of the Missionary Agencies in the United Methodist Tradition 1819-Present, General Commission on Archives and History, 1995

Slide 7

Organized for the Gospel



Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Women's Work 1919

- Missionary societies were created to meet the unique spiritual and physical needs of women and children.
- Successful mission endeavors could not have happened without the work of women missionaries.
- Women had easier access to local homes than their male counterparts and more readily identified with local women due to gender discrimination.
- Missionary societies created the first schools, homes, orphanages and hospitals specifically for women.
- Missions allowed professionally trained women such as doctors to practice their expertise when they could not easily do back home.

ARCHIVES & HISTORY

It is a well-known fact that many of our early successful mission endeavors both within the United States and abroad could not have happened without women missionaries. Women's missionary societies of predecessor United Methodist bodies were created to meet the unique spiritual, social and physical needs of women and children that larger, male dominated missionary boards could not do in the mid to late 19th century. Prior to the creation of these societies most of the women on the mission field were spouses with few exceptions.

Women missionaries had easier access to local homes than their male counterparts due to cultural or filial preference. These courageous missionaries motivated by God's love literally had a foot in the "open" door denied to their male counterparts. Plus they could easily identify with local women due to experiences of gender discrimination.

Missionary societies often created the first schools and hospitals to address education and health issues which allowed local women to experience new opportunities while creating new gender identities. Moreover, it also allowed professionally trained women missionaries who

desired to work in traditional male careers such as doctors to practice their expertise when they could not easily do so back home at that time.

Reference:

Image of Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Women's Home Mission Work from General Commission on Archives and History's Historic Maps Collection

Slide 8

Deaconess



Deaconess Home-Boston, MA

"When will the women of America awake to a sense of their responsibilities? And what great soul filled with love to God and man shall open the way and prepare the means whereby we may be enabled to compete successfully with our sisters of Rome, not only as general charity women but educators and succorers of the unfortunate ... Earnest thinkers upon the subject of 'woman's work in the church' are looking to the Quakers and Methodists to move forward in God's name ... leading their daughters into the full responsibilities of an entirely devoted Christian womanhood." Susan Fry - 1872

Duties of a Methodist Episcopal Church Deaconess - 1888

- Minister to the poor
- Visit the sick
- Pray with the dying
- Care for the orphan
- Seek the wandering
- Comfort the sorrowing
- Save the Sinner
- Relinquishing wholly all other pursuits
- Devote themselves to Christian labor to the best of their abilities
- Be at least 25 years old



Filipino Deaconesses



Martha Drummer - 1st MEC African American Deaconess Missionary



“The summer of 1887, [Lucy] [Rider Meyer](#) enlisted several of her trainees in a program of visiting and assisting the immigrant poor and needy in Chicago. A note appearing in the June *Message* announced this modest deaconess work with modest claim, ‘We believe this thought ... may be a seed with a life-germ in it which shall grow. We will plant it, and wait for the showers of Heaven and the shining sun.’ It was the real beginning of the Methodist deaconess movement in the United States.”*

“With the opening of a new school year, the principle decided to place the work on a permanent basis and asked two of her students, Isabelle Reeves and May Hilton, to become the nucleus of a deaconess home. They moved into a rented apartment within a few minutes’ walk to [Chicago Training School](#) ... The October issue of *The Message* announced the joyful news of

the establishment of this first deaconess home in American Methodism.”**

During the 1888 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in New York City two petitions were brought forth to create a formal deaconess ministry. After being referred to and approved by the Committee on Missions the General Conference approved the office with the following parameters: “To minister to the poor, visit the sick, pray with the dying, care for the orphan, seek the wandering, comfort the sorrowing, save the sinning, and relinquishing wholly all other pursuits, devote themselves in a general way to such forms of Christian labor as may be suited to their abilities.” When working in a local church the deaconess is to be considered a pastor’s helper but not a staff pastor. There was another stipulation that deaconesses could not administer the sacraments. This proved to be a handicap for overseas deaconess missionaries working in rural areas.

It should be noted during the same General Conference the male delegates voted not to seat the newly elected women delegates from their respective annual conferences including Frances Willard.

Early consecrated deaconesses were not married, did not receive a salary though they did get a monthly allowance and wore a supplied distinct dark colored outfit depending on the denomination. The uniform identified a deaconess when working in poor urban areas which allowed a modicum of protection. They also lived in deaconess homes owned and operated by the larger society. To become a deaconess one had to take two years of formal training in either social work or nursing. Eventually all our predecessor denominations operated training schools both here and abroad and by 1915 roughly sixty training schools were open to students. Unlike nuns and deaconess in other denominations Methodist deaconesses did not require a life-long commitment. By the 20th century deaconesses no long needed to be celibate.

Deaconesses became and continue to be part of the vanguard for the social gospel that in some ways helped to define certain tenets of the Progressive Era in the United States.

But deaconesses are not only about social gospel ministry. Deaconesses still consider teaching the Good News a major component in their ministry. To be a deaconess was and still requires being a dedicated Christian whose deep spirituality permeates everything they do in ministry. Thus the deaconess is a person has a healthy balance of piety and social concern in order to give cups of cold water in the name of Jesus. Without this balance the deaconess work in the church would not have been so successful.

Deaconesses early on became intimately involved welcoming immigrants, especially women and children, into the United States. Deaconesses at one time greeted immigrants at many points of entry on a 24/7, 365 days a year. They even gave small Christmas gifts to the newly arrived children! Special immigrant homes such as [Gum Moon](#) for Chinese children in San Francisco (1870) and the [Immigrant Girls Home](#) (1889) for single women in New York City were established to provide a safe haven from predatory persons or groups who exploited the

vulnerability of new arrivals. The deaconesses combated this predation by providing shelter, training, and other skills necessary for a sustainable new life.

Nursing, and by extension health care, quickly became a major option for a deaconess' career. Christ Hospital in Cincinnati, the first deaconess hospital in the Methodist Episcopal Church, had its beginnings when Isabella Thoburn, missionary to India and founder of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, came home on furlough and took home with her a woman she found ill in the streets; this woman could not be admitted to the city hospital because she was not a resident of the city.*** From that point on deaconess hospitals began to pop up across the United States and around the world.

Being a deaconess also meant that upon retirement you could spend the rest of your life in one of the many deaconess retirement homes. Bethesda, the first German Methodist Deaconess Home in the United States, likewise started in Cincinnati which provided the blueprint for future homes. Louise Golder was the first superintendent when Bethesda was founded on February 19, 1896.****

Since its inception the spirit and office of the deaconess greatly enhanced United Methodist women work while providing a sisterhood amongst women to serve in unselfish ministry to a broken world that all women and children found themselves in a daily basis. Deaconesses continued to labor in the spirit of Wesley's understanding of social holiness with the poor and downtrodden. That same spirit lives on today with the United Methodist deaconess work through United Methodist Women.

References:

* * * * * Jean Miller Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient*, p. 200 ff.

Susan Fry quote is from Encyclopedia of World Methodism, Volume 1 (1972), s.v. "Deaconess, Movement," by Mary Lou Barnwell.

Images from various General Commission on Archives and History Collections.

Slide 9

Gifts of Living Water

*These bold women with their audacious faith
became vessels of compassionate care around the world.*

Ministries Include:

- Schools
- Hospitals
- Clinics
- Orphanages
- Immigrant Homes
- Settlement Homes
- Retirement Homes
- Community Centers
- Sunday Schools
- Evangelistic Meetings
- Churches
- Other Ministries As Well!



McCurdy School, NM



Korea Medical Missionaries



Social Worker Plymouth Settlement House



Memorial Evangelical Church
LADY, WIFE
U.S. CH. HOME
REVIVAL MEETINGS
December 20th
January 10th
and other dates
Everybody Welcome



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These bold women with their audacious faith became vessels of compassionate care around the world. Where there were needs for the disadvantaged, outcasts, discrimination, illness, and the abandoned, United Methodist women rushed into the void to bring spiritual enlightenment and healing through physical ministries. Schools were established to raise women and children to greater economic and social possibilities in order to create better societies and stronger churches. Hospitals and clinics with a focus on the unique needs of gender and offspring were established to heal the body, mind and soul. These women created caring sanctuaries in the form of orphanages, retirement homes, nursing homes, immigrant homes, settlement homes, community centers, etc. in order to provide sacred places in sacred time while serving in the name of Jesus. They became evangelists, ministers, doctors, nurses, educators, social workers, historians, domestic workers, bishops, etc. in order to bring a full meaning to the Great Commission. Lest we forget United Methodist women also became one of two helpmates in ministry with their spouse or partner to enrich ministry where and when it was needed. By having the intense desire to give God's cleansing living water all United Methodist women and their respective forbearers stayed true to their missional calling regardless of race, culture, customs, language, religious beliefs and societal standing.

Reference:

Slide 10

Fighting for Clergy Rights



Lydia Sexton *Helenor M. Davisson* *Margaret Newton* *Anna Howard Shaw*
Van Cott

Ella Niswonger *Maud Kiester Jensen* *Julia Torres Fernandez* *Marjorie Matthews*

Leontine T. C. Kelly *Minerva Carcano* *Joaquina Nhanala* *Mao Her*

No Images in the Archives
Cornelia Mauyao
Mutombo Ilunga Kimba
Mamie Ming Yan Ko
Mochie Lam
Colleen Kyung Seen Chun
Lois V. Glory-Neal
Ana Maala Tiueti



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“[An] old man... was at first a great persecutor of preaching women... One day after the congregation was dismissed, he stood in the aisle until I came along by him, when he handed me twenty-five cents. That quarter was of great value to me, as I looked upon him as my persecutor. The brethren told me that he had said that our work was a money-making scheme; and if the people would quit paying the preachers they would quit preaching. When he handed me the quarter he told me to pray for him. That was a good omen. The same man professed religion [and] joined the church.”

From Autobiography of Lydia Sexton (1882)

The struggle for women’s full clergy rights became an arduous grass roots journey within United Methodism. Different predecessor denominations would grant full clergy rights for women at different times and then in a few cases lose them later on during a merger. The task at hand was to convince their male counterparts that God also called women to be of an equal level in ministry. The first tiny crack in this glass ceiling begins with Sarah Mallet who is authorized by John Wesley to preach despite resistance by other British Methodists. Another crack appeared

via the United Brethren Church when Charity Opheral is granted a preaching license. The next one came when [Lydia Sexton](#) is recommended by the UB General Conference to become a pulpit speaker. The ordination of Ella Niswonger in 1889 completed the drive for full clergy rights in the United Brethren Church.

Unfortunately the Evangelical Association and later the Evangelical Church did not allow women's full clergy rights. This would be a point of consternation when merging with the United Brethren in 1946. There were a few former UB women pastors who carried their credentials into the new church.

Other cracks began on the Methodist side of the ceiling which would become fissures because of the American Civil War. Methodist women became leaders of organizations to support the war. Women who felt called to preach would fill local pulpits when the male ministers became chaplains in the armed services. Of course these women had to step down from those pulpits when the war ended. But now there was an important shift that would eventually validate fully ordained women ministers in the church.

The next ceiling crack came from the Methodist Protestant Church when [Helenor Davisson](#) is ordained a deacon. By 1880, the glass ceiling began to lose smaller chunks because of [Anna Howard Shaw](#). Shaw, originally a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church and Boston University graduate, was all set to be ordained by the New England Annual Conference with Bishop Gilbert Haven's backing. With Haven's death in January 1880 closed the door on Shaw's chance for ordination. Later that same year General Conference disallows her ordination opportunity. Shaw follows the only opening available to her and switches to the Methodist Protestant Church where she is ordained by the New York Annual Conference.

A condition in the negotiations for the Methodist Protestants to be part of the 1939 merger to form the Methodist Church required their ordained clergy women to surrender their credentials. This became a bitter pill to swallow and the women clergy never forgotten the pain going into and beyond the new denomination. Both the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, were slowly inching forward by giving representative lay status for women but never to the point of full clergy rights prior to the 1939 merger. Meanwhile on the mission field a few women joined mission conferences in areas they served and would become ordained. The Methodist side of the glass ceiling was beginning to shake like never before in United Methodist history.

The two World Wars, especially World War 2, would completely blow out the rest of the ordination ceiling. Women were called on once more to serve their country both here and abroad. Due to the shortage of male labor in the United States women filled the factories to build war materials needed on the front as well as domestic products for the nation. They achieved higher officer ranks in the military while Methodist women once again filled pulpits. After the war many women lost their jobs when men returned home as did women ministers filling local church pulpits. Better educated and reaping the benefits of the Suffrage Movement provided many advantages that their post-Civil War sisters did not have at the time. By 1948,

there was a concerted effort by the Woman's Society of Christian Service and other women's lay groups to fight for full clergy inclusion at subsequent General Conferences. [Georgia Harkness](#), theologian and seminary professor, became a leading voice within the church.

The 1956 General Conference central theme centered on celebrating the 100 years of mission in India. But the fruit of Methodist women pushing for full clergy rights swept over the meeting like a tsunami. Finally the last pieces of the glass ceiling crashed down and after more than a century women were granted full clergy rights. These rights were maintained at the 1968 merger to form The United Methodist Church. But some local churches would not accept a woman pastoral appointment for another twenty years! By 1980, [Marjorie Matthews](#) broke another glass ceiling when consecrated as the first woman bishop in any large denomination. [Leontine Kelly](#) reached this same rarified air in 1984 as the first African American bishop. The path to the episcopal office was now open to clergy women and many would soon join the ranks.

- 1787** – Sarah Mallet is authorized by John Wesley to preach
- 1847** – Isabella Bomefree/Sojourner Truth, freed slave begins to preach (AME)
- 1849** - Charity Opheral is granted a preacher's license (UB)
- 1851** – Lydia Sexton recommended as a “pulpit speaker” at UB General Conference
- 1866** – Helenor M. Davisson ordained deacon by North Indiana Conference (MP)
- 1869** – Margaret Newton Van Cott first ME woman receives local preacher's license
- 1880** – Anna Howard Shaw ordained by New York Conference (MP)
- 1889** – Ella Niswonger first women ordained elder (UB)
- 1894** – Sarah Dickey is given full clergy rights (UB)
- 1956** – Maud Kiester Jensen given full clergy rights (M)
- 1958** – Antonia Wladar – ordained in the Central Europe Conference (M)
- 1959** – Emma P. Hill Burrell first African-American given full clergy rights (M)
- 1959** - Gusta A. Robinette ordained and appointed district superintendent Sumatra Conference (M)
- 1961** – Julia Torres Fernandez first Hispanic women ordained (M)
- 1967** – Margaret Henrichsen first American woman appointed DS. (UMC)
- 1971** – Cornelia Mauyao first woman ordained in Philippines Central Conference (UMC)
- 1979** – Mutombo Ilunga Kimba ordained elder in Congo, Africa Central Conference (UMC)
- 1980** – Marjorie Matthews first women elected bishop (UMC)
- 1982** – Mamie Ming Yan Ko and Mochie Lam, California-Nevada AC are first Chinese American women ordained elder (UMC)
- 1983** - Colleen Kyung Seen Chun, California-Nevada AC is first Korean American woman ordained elder (UMC)
- 1984** – Leontine T. C. Kelly is first African American elected bishop (UMC)
- 1989** – Lois V. Glory-Neal first Native American ordained elder and district superintendent (UMC)
- 1992** - Ana Moala Tiueti first Tongan woman ordained in both the church and the world (UMC)
- 2004** - Minerva Garza Carcano first Latina elected bishop (UMC)

2008 – Joaquina Filipe Nhanala first African elected bishop (UMC)

2016 - Mao Her first Hmong woman ordained elder (UMC)

References:

Images are from the General Commission on Archives and History Photographic Collections, United Methodist Communications and the Wisconsin Annual Conference.

Slide 11

Fighting for Laity Rights

- **1869** – Jennie Fowler Willing pushes the right for women to vote with African Americans for lay delegation rights to Methodist Episcopal Church General Conference.
- **1880** – General Conference rules women could hold local church offices and be quarterly conference members.
- **1888** - General Conference debates women's laity rights. The bishops deem the term "laymen" does not cover women.
- **1892** – Methodist Protestant Church grants women full laity rights.
- **1893** – United Brethren Church grants women full laity rights.
- **1900** - Methodist Episcopal Church grants women full laity rights.
- **1918** – Methodist Episcopal Church, South grants women full laity rights.
- Evangelical Association/Evangelical Church never grants women full conference rights.



Frances Willard



Belle Harris Bennett

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As stated before the Civil War era proved to be a successful test for Methodist women in leadership positions. Just as with the quest for full clergy credentials gaining laity rights proved almost as difficult. It comes as no surprise that the indomitable Jennie Fowler Willing fired one of the first shots across the bow in the lay rights movement. She made the case in 1870 “linking women’s ecclesial rights with those of their recently freed African American sisters and brothers, referencing women’s churchly accomplishments, and appealing to their responsible voting participation in the denomination’s 1869 referendum on lay delegation” (A Compact History, p. 145).

Methodist Episcopal Church women began the fight for inclusive language at this point in time. Much hinged on either an expansive or narrow meaning of *layman/laymen*. If the expansive

understanding of *layman/laymen* were adopted then women could hold leadership positions in the local church. These positions went far beyond a Sunday School teacher position but also included finance, trustees, and heads of departments. Plus it would allow voting membership in the annual quarterly conference (known today as the Charge Conference) to elect delegate representation. General Conference resisted and the legislation would fail in both the 1872 and 1976 meetings.

[Frances Willard](#), WCTU President and Suffrage leader became the focal point for the lay rights movement. In 1880, the infamous General Conference which turned down full clergy rights for women, debated if an invited woman could address the conference. The person in question was none other than Frances Willard. After a two hour debate on the subject coupled with [James Buckley's](#) vocal impediment to Willard speaking caused her to decline addressing the conference. As it turned out Willard and General Conference were not done with each other yet. Ironically the same General Conference did vote women could be members of a quarterly conference.

At the 1888 General Conference saw Willard once more and other Midwestern Methodist women elected as lay delegates from their respective annual conferences arrive to take part in the business of the church. To mark the occasion women filled the visitor seating hoping to see this historical moment finally come to past. The bishops, however, decided the definition of *laymen* excluded women. Clergy delegates voted with the bishops 154 to 122 whereas the male laity delegates split their vote 78 to 76 (*Companion*, p. 146). By 1900, the Methodist Episcopal Church revised the church Constitution which allowed equal laity rights to women. Finally in 1904 women were seated at General Conference with all the rights and privileges of elected lay delegates.

The Methodist Protestant Church being far ahead of their Methodist Episcopal cousins when it came to women's lay rights officially voted said rights during their 1892 General Conference and seated women lay delegates for the first time at the 1896 General Conference. The United Brethren Church voted full laity rights to their women members in 1893.

The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, finally came around to granting women full laity rights in 1922. But this vote would not happen without another prolonged struggle. Belle Harris Bennett, founder of Scarritt Bible Training School for deaconess, organizer of the Woman's Home Missionary Society and founder of settlement houses for the urban poor led the charge. Petitions in favor of women's full laity rights bombarded the 1910 General Conference. Bennett was invited to speak at the conference but like her counterpart in the North, Frances Willard, was denied the chance to address the delegates. Four years later the MECS bishops dismissed laity rights once more. Finally during the 1918 General Conference women gained full laity rights and were seated at the following general conference. Belle Harris Bennett was part of the first delegation but became too ill to attend and died shortly after the meeting.

Of all the predecessor denominations only the Evangelical Association/Evangelical Church never granted full laity rights to women members. The women in this tradition did not receive their

rights until the 1946 merger with the United Brethren Church to form the Evangelical United Brethren Church.

References:

Richey, Rowe and Schmidt, *American Methodism: A Compact History*, pp. 145-147

Images are from the General Commission on Archives and History Photograph Collection

Slide 12

Fighting the Moral Fight: Temperance and Racism

TEMPERANCE

- Temperance movement organized to fight “demon alcohol.”
- Alcoholism endangers home life.
- Woman’s Christian Temperance Union organized in 1874.
- Frances Willard early leader.
- WCTU begins to focus on broader social issues.



Frances Willard



Immigrant Poverty c. 1919

RACISM

- Methodist struggle against racism since birth.
- Methodism is an abolitionist denomination.
- Racism still exists despite official abolitionism.
- Church splits over slavery in 1844.
- Methodist women north and south fight racism.
- United Methodist Women continue the fight against racism.



Bishop Minerva Carcano



Theresa Hoover



Temperance

After the Civil War alcoholism became a major concern in all our predecessor denominations. Churches would organize Temperance boards to fight the “demon alcohol”. Alcoholism, combined with other negative social factors such as poverty, low wages, industrial inhospitable working conditions, poor housing, etc. made life for the average American an intolerable, crushing reality. More often than not individual homes became the venting spot from the toxic combination of above mentioned factors that produced a dangerous environment within the home. Many women and children would be the recipient of abuse, abandonment, poverty, etc. Naively the church viewed alcohol as the root of all evil. To combat the immorality of alcohol and its side effects Methodists, as well as other Protestant denominations, saw the moral

answerer in the Temperance movement. Church leaders, men and women, believed if you could organize the fight against the purchase and use of alcohol then many contemporary evils would vanish. Of course we know from history that alcoholism was not the singular root of evil but a serious byproduct of larger social problems.

United Methodist women were on the vanguard of the Temperance movement. In 1874, the [Woman's Christian Temperance Union](#), led by two Methodist women, organized to help lead the charge. Two factors made the organization a success: support for the work by both genders and large female membership gains right from the beginning. At first the WCTU solely focused on the prohibition of alcohol because it was perceived as a women's issue. Further reasoning on the idea as a woman's issue birthed a new paradigm of womanhood that was needed to rethink the structure of society and home life. World renowned Methodist [Frances Willard](#), WCTU president and social activist, understood the mission of this new idea of womanhood should make, "the whole world homelike." (Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient*, p. 24). In 1895, Willard defined the WCTU mission in terms of religious purity. No longer should Christian women accept a relative purity standard as the norm in moral matters. Rather there is an immediate need for women to embrace a complete purity on the issues in order to bring about the end of alcohol use and other relevant social evils. Eventually, WCTU members realized that Willard's [Do Everything Policy](#) required a broader scope to their work. The goals now included, "...woman suffrage, social (sexual) purity, concerns of labor, peace and arbitration, welfare work, temperance education and health." (Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient*, p. 158). WCTU's new foci started the march for greater social reform on behalf of all women and children which continues today with United Methodist Women.

Racism

The struggle against racism began at the birth of British Methodism. Starting with the Wesleys the idea of race theory and subsequently human bondage were considered an abomination to God's creation and contrary to Christian ethics. John put considerable energy to end the slave trade up to his dying breath. The British Methodists embraced abolitionism as a tenet of their movement. Early American Methodist leaders such as Francis Asbury and the Methodist Episcopal Church believed in abolitionism. As time went by there were Methodists, especially in the South, disagreed with the abolitionist stance which would have future consequences in the not too distant future. There are instances that even Methodist abolitionists would turn an intentional eye on other forms of racism. Our history teaches us that African American Methodists were seen as inferior members to white members of within the church. Early membership statistics that appeared in the general minutes broke down membership according to race. After a time discontented Black members left to create new African American denominations such as the African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion and the Colored (later Christian) Methodist Episcopal Churches. The institution of slavery eventually became a powder keg between regional Methodists which finally exploded during the 1844 General Conference. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South split off from the Methodist Episcopal Church over the institution of slavery. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, would

continue to allow for slavery until the end of the Civil War. The two groups would not get back together until the 1939 merger.

United Methodist women fought against racism born out of personal experience as being second class individuals as well. Despite Asbury being an abolitionist he did create a segregated local church structure separating women and African Americans for temporal and spiritual efficiency. After the Civil War Methodist women on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line would come to fight racism in their own ways as one of the greatest evils of society. Early examples of slowly changing racist viewpoints in the church came in the persons of [Jarena Lee](#) and [Maggie Van Cott](#) who both preached at interracial meetings when other Methodists refused to do so.

In the north Methodist women who began working amongst the poor, immigrants and African Americans through deaconesses' ministries, education and health initiatives, etc. and saw firsthand the suffering and injustice society placed upon these groups. One of the first items of business was education. These women established and taught in African American colleges and secondary schools in order to give self-identity, chance of equality amongst their gender and realization of talent. They established social support institutions through the Woman's Foreign and Home Missionary Society, Deaconess Society (who recruited black deaconess) and the WCTU to aid African Americans and other immigrant groups to become fully integrated into American society.

Southern Methodist women struggled with racism visibly came through the leadership of the Woman's Missionary Council (WMC). The WMC reached out to African American communities in conjunction with Colored (Christian) Methodist Episcopal Church (CME) women. Through a series of life changing dialogues and listening sessions created a bond of trust between the groups and then began to work together on social endeavors such as funding women's programs at Paine College, and establishing settlement homes known as Bethlehem Centers that still exist today (Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient*, p. 275). In a world where lynching, KKK intimidation, and other social evils against African Americans were a daily occurrence in the south the WMC created a *Commission on Race Relations* (CRR) in 1920 to specifically meet the needs of black women and children. Like the Temperance movement before the CRR saw lynching was a woman's problem and led the way to establish anti-lynching reform organizations such as the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention for Lynching (1930) and the Fellowship of the Concerned in 1949 (Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient*, p. 277 ff.). The WMC even recommended against the 1939 merger because the creation of a Central Jurisdiction was nothing more than blatant racial oppression.

The creation of the Central Jurisdiction (CJ) had one positive aspect in that allowed Black leadership on all levels of the church without being overseen by their white counterparts. The CJ women organized their mission work along the same structures established by earlier mission boards. They pioneered the establishment of schools for Black females, created their own deaconess society, built sanctuary Friendship homes for southern black women moving to northern cities, clinics and community centers (Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient*, p. 287). They also elected black women to key positions on the Board of Missions and Woman's Division of

Christian Service and later the Women's Division, General Board of Global Ministries. Notable persons include Charlotte French, Lillian Warrick, [Vivienne Newton Gray](#), [Theresa Hoover](#) and [Ellen Barnette](#).

Methodist Women, including their sisters in the United Brethren Church, fought for additional church diversity and voice by working with Native American, Latina, Asian and Oceanic women. Today's United Methodist Women continue to fight racism in all forms.

Resources:

Schmidt, Jean Miller. *Grace Sufficient: A History of Women in American Methodism, 1760-1939*. Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1999.

Images are from the General Commission on Archives Photograph Collection

Slide 13

United Methodist Women Caucus Organized



Thelma Stevens

"The year 1972 finds a great many women ... tired of waiting to be full, equal, and responsible participants in the total life of the church. Small tokens and symbols of power are not enough in the Church of Jesus Christ! Of course the United Methodist Women's Caucus had to be born and named. The time is ripe for women to emerge as fully empowered human beings in The United Methodist Church, responsible participants in its total life. Such empowerment demands a commitment to seek those qualities of Christian life that will save us all from the bigotry and self-centered motivation that hampers our Christian witness—and keeps the church from being God's people responding worthily in his name."

- Organized in 1972 which combined several women's groups in the UMC.
- When UMW was organized women delegates to General Conference was a paltry 10%.
- There were two main priorities in the beginning.
- First was to petition General Conference to acknowledge woman and minorities as co-equal among other issues
- Second was to create the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women.



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Slide 14

COSROW

- Emerged from the social climate in 1960s America.
- Conceived after a 1968 General Conference Study Commission on the Participation of Women.
- COSROW established during 1972 General Conference.
- Fosters awareness of problems/issues on the status & role of women in full participation within the church
- Advocates for affirmative action, personnel policies, fight sexual harassment, abolish discriminatory language within the church and fights all forms of sexism.



Barbara Ricks Thompson



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The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women ([COSROW](#)) was established by the 1972 General conference of The United Methodist Church. Emerging from the social climate of the Civil Rights era of the 1960s, the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women was conceived when a 1968 report presented by the Women's Society of Christian Service, known today as United Methodist Women, requested that a study commission be established to research the involvement, or lack thereof, on women in all aspects of the United Methodist Church. By 1972, a group of fifty women from the Wheadon United Methodist Church in Illinois, which would later become the United Methodist Women's Caucus, joined the Women's Division in supporting the idea of a new commission that would address the various levels of access that women had to power in the life of the church. All of this coalesced when Thelma Stevens, a UMW Caucus representative, presented a proposal to establish a quadrennial commission that would address the inclusion of women in all levels of decision making in the United Methodist Church.

In response the General Conference created a new commission with the responsibility of fostering awareness of problems and issues related to status and role of women. A special focus was on the full participation in the life of the church at least commensurate with its total membership in The United Methodist Church. In the tradition of The Woman's Division, and

other predecessors, the commission continued to accumulate statistics documenting the presence of women in the life of The United Methodist Church. The Commission understood itself as an advocate for affirmative action, personnel policies, and grievance procedures and as an ally to victims of sexual harassment. Over time, it has sought to eradicate discriminatory language, racism, combat homophobia and provide regional training for those interested in challenging sexism and other forms of oppression.

Reference:

Images from Commission on the Status and Role of Women Collection, General Commission on Archives and History

Slide 15

United Methodist Women Today



Statement from Harriett Jane Olson, UMW General Secretary

*"The Traditional Plan adopted by General Conference invites clergy, bishops and congregations who do not support the church's stand regarding LGBTQIA persons to leave the denomination and form another expression of Methodism. However, while our membership has many opinions about the matters considered at General Conference, **United Methodist Women stands together, committed to serving women, children and youth. Part of the United Methodist Women Purpose is to be a creative supportive fellowship, and that's what we intend to do.***

"For United Methodist Women, commitment to the Purpose and prayer are the only litmus tests for determining who can belong, who can serve and who can devote themselves to mission. Our differences make us stronger. We continue to be open to any woman who chooses to commit to our Purpose and mission.

*"The Special General Conference was difficult for all—even the Traditional Plan adopted may not be enforceable—but LGBTQIA sisters and brothers bear the brunt of the pain. **United Methodist Women will continue to pray for our beloved church and stand in solidarity with all those who are in pain. "United Methodist Women will continue our focus on mission, living out our Christian discipleship together, and addressing the needs of women, children and youth."***

<https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/news/united-methodist-women-vows-to-work-across-difference>



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Today's United Methodist Women is the end result of a one-hundred and fifty year *organized* struggle born out of the crucible of the American Civil War. The struggle gave new avenues for women to become important assets during the bloody struggle from local sewing groups to leaders of organizations to bring comfort and care to those affected by the war. In a time when the country began to change its self-identity, women realized their experiences gave them a legitimate voice for social holiness, gender equality, and racism, ministry due to a tested and hard won moral authority. Methodist, United Brethren and Evangelical women were on the

forefront in shaping the new American Identity as well as rethinking representation in their respective denominations. These audacious women with bold faith gave us a missionary vision of a better world through compassion, mercy, justice, education, child welfare, temperance, and the fight for other social ills fueled by the Gospel mandate of giving a cup of cold water in Jesus' name. That legacy is still the driving force behind United Methodist Women's world-wide reach today. It is not an understatement to say we as a church often find our better angels in the women of our United Methodism.

The United Methodist Women Caucus formed in 1972 in a world of monumental change both within and beyond the church: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1972_in_the_United_States. It was a time when women delegates to the 1972 General Conference numbered ten percent. To make matters worse women clergy with full membership in annual conferences numbered only one percent! Through the work of the Women's Division with [Theressa Hoover](#), and African American Methodist , at its helm pushed General Conference for a guarantee that more women, minorities and youth would become denominational leaders or have appropriate representatives in the decision making process. This was especially true for minority women. The Caucus represented a grassroots movement to push these concerns through the General Conference. By working with the Women's Division and the General Conference Study Commission helped to give birth to the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women.

The success of United Methodist Women can be seen in its membership growth. In 1869, there were only eight members at the time of formation as the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society in Boston to over [800,000 members today](#). The sheer number of hospitals, clinics, settlement homes, immigrant homes, retirement homes, orphanages, secondary and higher education schools, community centers, etc. is only a sample of their historic impact around the world.

Reference:

Image: Courtesy of United Methodist News Service – Leaders of United Methodist Women help celebrate the organization's 150th birthday during the 2016 United Methodist General Conference in Portland, Ore. From left are: Harriett Olson, Yvette Richards, Annabelle Bricker, Bethany Amey and Emma Cantor. Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS

Suggested Resources

Timelines:

http://s3.amazonaws.com/gcah.org/WOMENS_TIMELINE.pdf
<https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/about/history/timeline>
<https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/ritimeline>
<http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/timeline-of-women-in-methodism>

Websites:

<http://gcah.org/resources/womens-history>
<https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/about/history/>
<https://gcsrw.org/MonitoringHistory/WomeninUMCHistory.aspx>
<http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/archives-notable-women-in-methodist-history>
<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship/womens-history>

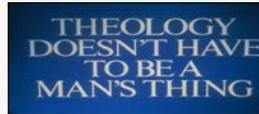
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Acknowledgements



Any project of this scope is beyond the work of a single person or staff. There are a few individuals we would like to recognize who gave us carte blanche with their agency resources: Harriett Olson, General Secretary, UMW; Joe Iovino UMCOM; and Mike Dubose, UMNS. It takes a community, or in this case a church connection, to tell the old, old story even if it involves contemporary events. Therefore, GCAH would like to thank the following organizations who helped to make our Heritage Sunday offerings to you a bit more special.

– Mark Shenise, Associate Archivist

- United Methodist Women
- United Methodist Communications
- United Methodist News Service
- Wisconsin Annual Conference

Reference:

Image from General Commission on the Status and Role of Women Collection, General Commission on Archives and History