

## A Brief History of the YMCA Mission

A great place to start when getting involved with any organization or corporation is to find out why the organization was begun. This is particularly true in regards to service and ministry organizations because they are born out of a sense of meeting peoples' needs. In this area of meeting needs, the YMCA has a rich history and a clear sense of purpose.

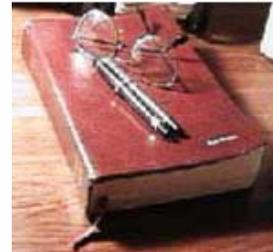
### How the YMCA was founded



Sir George Williams was born in a farmhouse in southern England in 1821. He was brought up in the Church of England. However, when young George arrived in the city to become an assistant drapers apprentice, he found his faith lacking. He managed to find a few young workers who, by their example, encouraged him to give his own life more completely to Jesus Christ. On June 4, 1844, twelve men, led by George Williams, founded the Young Men's Christian Association, and thus the YMCA was born.

### The original Mission Statement

***"The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) seeks to unite those young men, who regarding Jesus Christ as their God and Savior, according to the Holy Scriptures, desire to be His disciples in their faith and in their life, and to associate their efforts for the extension of His Kingdom amongst young men."***



It was also decreed at this time that differences of opinion on other matters, however important, should not interfere.

### How the YMCA came to the United States

Around 1850, Thomas Sullivan of Boston was organizing groups to pass out pamphlets that explained the message of God's love in Jesus Christ. From his journal in 1851 we read this,

***"In October of 1851, I read this newspaper account of this new organization in London that had been formed for young men who had pledged their lives to Jesus Christ and needed a wholesome alternative to life on the street. I thought this would fit my young men just fine. So I traveled to London to visit the YMCA, and upon my return summoned together other concerned Christian leaders to consider establishing a YMCA in order that these young men be nurtured in their Christian faith. We agreed to start the first YMCA in the United States."***

By 1855, there were 24 YMCAs across the United States from New York to San Francisco and from New Orleans to Detroit and Washington DC. The first national meeting was held in New York, forming a voluntary association of YMCA's in the U.S. and Canada.

None of these YMCAs had buildings at the time- they were simply organized groups that reached out and disciplined young men. It was not until 1859, that the first YMCA building was built in Baltimore, Maryland.

### How the Y has always tried to reach out to specific needs

Each local organization tailored the programs to the needs of the communities it served.

- To Soldiers In the Civil War, they ministered near the lines, in camps, hospitals and prisons.

- To miners in Pennsylvania
- To lumberjacks in Wisconsin
- To railroad workers and passengers in train stations
- To soldiers in WWI and WWII, they provided physical, emotional and spiritual care
- To High Risk kids, they developed a National mini-bike program.

### How strong leadership helped continue the Mission into the mid 1900s



John Mott was one of the most effective National Presidents of the YMCA and oversaw the YMCA-USA during the early to mid 1900s. His leadership role began in the U.S. in 1915 and continued both in the U.S. and internationally through the mid 1940s. He was such a Christian statesman for the YMCA that he was asked to serve as the Secretary of State for a U.S. President. He declined this position saying, "I feel like I could do more good through the YMCA." His work through the YMCA eventually led him to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

Through John Mott's vision for reaching out to people with the love and message of Jesus Christ, the YMCA was greatly strengthened. Much of the international expansion of the YMCA occurred as a result of his vision as President of the YMCA-USA. Here are his thoughts on how to keep the YMCA a vital organization:

*"If the Young Men's Christian Association is to increase its spiritual vitality and fruitfulness, it must maintain at all costs its distinctively Christian, pronouncedly evangelistic, and aggressively missionary character. This is tantamount to saying that it must preserve its clear Christian aim, its unshakable Christian foundation, and its genuinely Christian control; that it must hold in proper prominence its Christian program and be animated by a genuinely Christian spirit.*

*The Association must steadfastly resist the danger of becoming a mere human institution - in a general sense religious but not emphatically, pervasively, and contagiously Christian. This essential must never be compromised, obscured, or abandoned for the sake of any plausible outward success or worldly advantage for such a course would mark the beginning of the end. Wherever an Association lacks world-conquering power, it is because it has to some extent been conquered by the world."*

### Original Mission re-affirmed over 100 years later

*"The Paris Basis expresses that Christ is the center of the Movement, which is conceived as a worldwide fellowship uniting Christians of all confessions. It is consistent with an open membership policy involving people irrespective of faith as well as age, sex, race and social conditions." - Kampala Principles, 1973*

### Today Branch Christian Emphasis Committees across the country are keeping the mission in focus.

*"Acknowledging the Christian Principles upon which the YMCA was founded, the Branch Christian Emphasis Committees help create opportunities for members, volunteers and staff to reach their potential as children of God through the lifting up of Jesus Christ and our Christian Mission." – A Statement from a Branch Christian Emphasis Committee*