

United Methodist Women Economic Justice Mission Legacy

United Methodist Women is 150 Years Old! United Methodist Women has been “expanding concepts of mission” for all these years, including service and advocacy for economic justice. This is comprised of direct service, national mission institutions and international ministries, as well as developing leaders to understand the economy, Bible studies on God’s Economy of Grace, National Seminars, work with cutting-edge partners, advocacy, research and more.

In 2019, Mission u is undertaking the studies *Women United for Change: 150 Years in Mission and Practicing Resurrection: The Gospel of Mark and Radical Discipleship*, while continuing to explore *What About Our Money? As background for each of these studies, following are some highlights of United Methodist Women’s engagement in economic justice over the years. This is by no means an exhaustive list!*¹

Decade or Year	Action taken by United Methodist Women and Predecessor Organizations
1869	Our legacy began when the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society (WFMS) first organized in Boston in response to a lack of women’s healthcare in India. Methodist and Evangelical United Brethren women were concerned about the poverty and health of women in nations around the world and raised money to address these issues. The Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society was able to establish the first hospital/clinic to care for women and girls in India. It also sponsored the first educational establishment for girls in Korea, which grew to become what we now know as Ewha Womans University — a preeminent educational institution in Asia. The WFMS was established to address the economic well-being of women around the world. From the beginning, members used the power of the purse to change lives and influence policy.
1879	Frances Willard, a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, became leader of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WTCU), which had hundreds of thousands of members. During her tenure the organization viewed alcohol as an economic justice concern. At a time when there were no social safety nets, alcohol abuse by spouses cut into the family budget and often led to domestic violence. The WTCU platform included campaigns for labor laws, prison reform and women’s suffrage.
1880	The Woman’s Home Missionary Society was organized, and Lucy Webb Hayes was elected president. Ten years later, 1890, the Society was recognized by the Methodist Episcopal Church’s General Conference.

1. We welcome your own stories of how you have been involved with United Methodist Women in the area of Economic Justice. Please send them to cbarton@unitedmethodistwomen.org



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<p>1866 to early 1900s</p>	<p>At a time of increased immigration to the U.S. and growing industrialization and urbanization, women responded through the rise of women’s missionary organizations, the settlement house movement and the deaconess movement. In her book <i>Lifting Up Hope, Living Out Justice: Methodist Women and the Social Gospel</i>, Alice Knotts notes Chicago was the hub for the Chicago Training School, which trained deaconesses; Hull House was established by Jane Adams; and emerging analyses of the systemic nature of evil that women confronted in tenements and sweatshops. This was all part of the Social Gospel movement. The Methodist Federation of Social Service (later the Methodist Federation for Social Action) was influential in labor and economic justice matters. Several deaconesses were involved with MFSS from the beginning. During the 1920s and 1930s MFSS leadership was shared by deaconess Winifred Chappell, an advocate for workers’ rights.</p> <p>As noted in Mission u 2019 study, <i>Women United for Change, 150 Years in Mission</i>, “United Methodist Women predecessors practiced Social Gospel theology...by establishing settlement houses.” The houses became a place where those directly affected by poverty lived with more affluent people, who learned about how to respond to community needs. Some of these evolved into today’s Bethlehem and Wesley houses, and among United Methodist Women’s National Mission Institutions “[t]he founders and deaconesses who worked in the settlements...were committed to better race relations.”</p> <p>Methodist community centers, urban centers, medical missions and homes for children were established in the early 1900s. These facilities offered recreation and health services for adults and youth in economically deprived communities. According to <i>Women United for Change, 150 Years in Mission</i>, “Without regulation, employers demanded that women and children work far too many hours, often in dangerous conditions...Wages were so low that families were crowded together in tenement housing. They lacked sufficient food and basic health care. The Social Gospel movement was a response from the church to these social problems...” The women took on legislation such as sanitation and child labor laws, juvenile courts and parks. “In many localities, women’s societies established safe, affordable boardinghouses for young women who came to cities for jobs.”</p>
<p>1923</p>	<p>As part of their concern for promoting temperance, members of United Methodist Women predecessors realized they would need a constant presence on Capitol Hill to influence legislators. They bought property and established a building, which exists today across from the Supreme Court and Capitol—home to many faith and non-profit groups working for peace and justice. This is just one of the important examples where United Methodist Women and its predecessor organizations used their collective economic power to foster their moral aims.</p>
<p>1930s</p>	<p>Members of United Methodist Women predecessors were active in anti-lynching societies across the South. The Klan used terror to re-enforce Jim Crow segregation that maintained control over an impoverished Black workforce. The horrific apartheid system meant loss of life and livelihoods and kept Black people in economic subjugation. Methodist women also called for the end of the poll tax and racial discrimination in voter registration requirements.</p>
<p>1920s to 1960s</p>	<p>Racial relations work in the 1920s to 1960s challenged Jim Crow segregation and a segregated Methodist Church.</p>
<p>1930s</p>	<p>According to an oral history by Thelma Stevens, former Women’s Division staff member, the Depression left thousands of people in the U.S. without resources for food and basic needs. Methodist women educated members about the movement to build labor unions, supporting the creation of the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations, later merged into the AFLCIO).</p>

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1939	National Seminar, then five-week sessions for 40 women at Scarritt College, focused on organized labor and working conditions of women in cotton factories in the South as well as child labor, through the Methodist Episcopal Church South. National Seminars have had an ongoing focus on economic justice through the section on Christian Social Relations and later Christian Social Action.
1940s	Members of United Methodist Women predecessors worked for the formation of the United Nations and supported its efforts to create policies and programs for equity between nations.
1940s/ 1950s	<p>Members of United Methodist Women predecessors used their economic power to protest segregation and refused to patronize hotels/establishments for meetings that did not allow women of color and white women to meet together. They were out front of the rest of the church on this. In subsequent years, they continued to use this power of the purse to advance racial and labor justice by evaluating hotel policies across the U.S. and making meeting arrangements accordingly.</p> <p>At a time when the Methodist Church had a segregated jurisdiction that mirrored Jim Crow segregation, the Women's Division of Christian Service in 1941 adopted a policy of "<i>holding its meetings only in places where all members of its group can be entertained without any form of racial discrimination.</i>"</p>
1942	The first Assembly was scheduled to be held in St. Louis, Missouri. The event was relocated to Columbus, Ohio, where Black women attending the meeting were admitted as guests in the city's hotels. "Facing This Hour," was the title of the message delivered by Mrs. J. D. Bragg, president.
1948	The Women's Division and Central Jurisdiction supported legislation for the improvement of living standards for farmworkers and domestic servants who had been excluded from New Deal benefits.
1951	The book States' Laws on Race and Color, by Pauli Murray, was published by the Women's Division. The book became a key source for the U.S. Supreme Court in its deliberations on the landmark decision, "Brown vs. Board of Education."
1960s - 2018	The Women's Division Public Policy office on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., mobilized member advocacy on legislation related to economic justice.
1960	<p>United Methodist Women predecessors and the General Board of Church and Society were co-founders of the Methodist Office for the United Nations when it opened in 1960 in the Carnegie Building in New York City. They worked to raise money for a permanent space for the global faith community to engage at the United Nations – the Church Center for the UN. The building opened in 1963 and is run by United Methodist Women today. The United Methodist Office for the United Nations (UMOUN) addressed issues of global economic development for the church.</p> <p>The women began co-hosting educational seminars on peacemaking issues. These later became the Joint Seminar Program for National and International Affairs, co-sponsored by the General Board of Church and Society. The seminars, serving youth and adults, included a strong focus on U.S. and global economic justice, and continued through 2018.</p>
1966	Mission study: <i>Affluence and Poverty</i> .

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1968 -1984	World Development seminars, including jurisdictional workshops, focused on global economic relations and impact on nations in the global South.
1969	The Women's Division supported the "Poor People's Campaign" led by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in partnership with the National Welfare Rights Organization, calling to unify poor people across racial lines
1969 -1983	The Women's Division held consultation on History of Employed Women.
1971	The Women's Division was a founding member of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility. As such, United Methodist Women members began to expand and systematize its use of corporate shareholder tools to advance its peace and justice priorities.
1971	The National Farm Worker Ministry (NFWM) grew out of the request by Cesar Chavez for faith communities to stand with farm workers on picket lines and in boycotts that paved the way for the United Farm Workers (UFW) union. Born out of the National Council of Churches Migrant Ministries, NFWM incorporated as a separate organization in 1971. Over the years, NFWM has accompanied farm workers by mobilizing the faith community to bring their moral authority and power of the purse. United Methodist Women members have been active since the early years and joined The United Methodist Church in boycotting California grapes and lettuce in the early days of the UFW union. Caesar Chavez came to Women's Division offices in New York to encourage support for the renewed lettuce boycott, which was done. The Women's Division and United Methodist Women members also joined the Campbell's Soup boycott in support of Ohio tomato pickers with the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC).
1974-1976	United Methodist Women members across the country focused on the issue of hunger.
1975	Mission study: <i>The Welfare Maze</i>
1975	<i>Women's Consultation on Development</i> was held in Manila, Philippines, to address global economic concerns as they impacted women.
1977-1984	United Methodist Women members supported the worldwide Nestle infant formula boycott because of its dangerous impact on newborns. Reliance on formula, heavily promoted by Nestle, had led to a dramatic rise in infant mortality in many nations of the Global South because mothers did not have access to clean water in which to mix the formula and could not afford quantities needed.
1978 -1981	The Women's Division supported the JP Stevens boycott by textile workers in the South, made famous by the movie <i>Norma Rae</i> .
1978	United Methodist Women members participated in economic surveys by jurisdiction and an Economic Justice Seminar.
1970s to 1980s	United Methodist Women members mobilized to advocate for the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (ERA). Conference United Methodist Women members had ERA coordinators, and members worked vigilantly. The main concerns were about economic justice regarding fair wages and benefits for women.

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1970s to present	Ecumenical work through National and World Council of Churches advanced economic justice concerns. Women’s Division participated in the Ecumenical Church Loan Fund (ECLOF) to support small agriculture and enterprises globally.
Late 1970s-1980s	Women’s Division staff played a key role in advising negotiators in the development of the path-breaking UN Law of the Sea treaty, and then set up a series of ongoing trainings at CCUN to help members understand its importance and relevance to their lives and the need for the U.S. to ratify the treaty. This helped to introduce the concept of the “global commons” – critical resources that all countries need to be able to utilize and protect for everyone’s economic well-being.
1979	Women’s Division partnered with the Women and Welfare Project.
1980s	The 1980s, with Reagan and Thatcher in power, marked a significant shift in the economy as “globalization” picked up steam. Rising oil prices meant rising interest rates and a global debt crisis opened the way for banks and international financial institutions to dictate policies to poor nations. United Methodist Women members joined partners in exploring how cuts to public services, privatization, deregulation and “free-trade” regimes impacted women, youth and children. In the U.S., this new world meant de-industrialization, companies moving production to other countries and job loss.
1980s	The Joint Panel on International Affairs, organized by the United Methodist Office for the United Nations, involved United Methodist bishops, directors and staff of the Women’s Division, the General Board of Church and Society and the General Board of Global Ministries to address critical global issues, including global economic justice.
1980	The Women’s’ Division entered a court case regarding the 1976 Hyde Amendment, which refused Medicaid reimbursement to low-income women seeking an abortion. The case went to the U.S. Supreme Court with Women’s Division Deputy General Secretary Theresa Hoover, and Ellen Kirby, leader of Section of Christian Social Responsibility, as “friends of the court.”
1980s	The Women’s Division worked to support the woodcutter’s union in Mississippi.
1983	National Seminar focused on Economics in the Faith Community, strengthening United Methodist Women’s economic justice work. Several members drafted a resolution calling upon the Women’s Division to pursue economic justice as one of the social justice priorities.
1983	The Public Policy Office in the Washington, D.C., focused on women and the budget and advocated for Advocacy for the Federal Economic Equity Act.
1984	<i>Managing Our Money</i> , by Joyce Sohl, Women’s Division CEO, supported women’s financial literacy and empowerment.
1984 - 85	Women’s Division organized political skills workshops, <i>Making a Difference: Women in Electoral Politics</i> . Moving into elected office could advance policies to address women’s concerns, including economic justice.

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1984	Women's Division staff helped to found the Debt Crisis Network with Institute for Policy Studies, Development Gap and other organizations focused on the roots and impact of Third World debt. They funded and distributed the film <i>The Global Assembly Line</i> . They commissioned Sweet Honey in the Rock founder Bernice Johnson Reagan to write a song exploring the connection between women's labor, global economic dynamics, consumption and poverty-- "Are My Hands Clean?" --which became a big hit for the acapella group.
1985	Women's Division staff was present at the Nairobi UN World Conference on Women, where a major focus was on globalization's impact on women, including debt, trade and structural adjustment programs.
1986	The Women's Division withdrew investments in 14 companies doing business in South Africa to add pressure to end apartheid in response to anti-apartheid leaders' requests. The United Nations supported South African divestment in 1962. The campaign was embraced by churches and universities in the U.S. in the 1980s. In gratitude for the U.S. faith community's strong support, in 1990 Nelson Mandela, newly freed from prison (1989), came to New York City and Riverside Church to thank representatives of the faith community personally
1988	Women's Division supported the Institute for Policy Studies creation of a comic book, <i>Inside the Global Debt Crisis</i> .
1988	Women's Division introduced "Global Debt Crisis: A Call for Jubilee" resolution to General Conference.
1988 - 89	Mission study: <i>Faces of Poverty in Our Midst</i>
1987 - 88	As part of a post-Nairobi reflection process, Women's Division staff helped to finance and launch the Women's Alternative Economics Network, WAEN, to look at the economic issues facing women in the U.S., particularly women of color, linked to challenges facing women in the Global South. WAEN convened grassroots women leaders and women popular educators to expand women's understanding of how the economy impacted their lives and what they could do about it.
1989 -1990	Women's Division staff supported the Religious Network for Equality for Women, RNEW, in a national economic literacy training project conducted in partnership with Church Women United. United Methodist Women members were active participants.
1990s	Women's Division staff helped to start Alternative Women in Development, Alt-WID, a network of women activists, advocates and academics to promote gender equality, anti-racist and sustainable national and international policies. They promoted everyday women's ability to advocate for the kinds of policies that would improve their lives. One later outcome, Women's Division helped to create the Economic Literacy Action Network, ELAN, to develop popular education resources for understanding the economy.

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1990s – The Decade on Trade	In the midst of negotiations for the North American Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA, Women’s Division launched a major member education campaign on the multiple impacts of cross-border trade, with a focus on women’s health and employment. They also funded and participated in groups promoting cross-border solidarity, such as the Coalition on Justice in the Maquiladoras, Tennessee Industrial Renewal Network and Mujeres Latinas En Accion. Members engaged in corporate campaigns related to companies closing up shops, not paying their workers in the U.S. and moving to Mexico. One target: Levi’s. With <i>Mujeres Latinas En Acción</i> , United Methodist Women members were among the first to advocate with members of Congress regarding conditions for women workers in “maquiladora” sweatshops on the U.S./Mexico border. Working with allies in the faith, labor and environmental community, the Women’s Division was able to halt “fast track” consideration, which would have enabled a more hasty consideration of NAFTA legislation. While advocates were not successful in getting strong labor and environmental protections into NAFTA, they were able to ensure that at least some provisions were included – setting a new precedent for trade negotiations. The education and policy advocacy continued around subsequent trade deals – such as the one with Central America and some Caribbean nations.
1992	United Methodist Women members joined Methodist Women of Brazil at the United Nations Rio Earth Summit. This gathering of governments and civil society explored the economic development needs of countries of the Global South and the emerging awareness of how our economic systems were harming the environment. Delegation participants tracked government positions and met with civil society allies to formulate a joint strategy for influencing the nature of the economics discussions at the Beijing UN Women’s Conference, which would happen three years later – in 1995. In addition, the delegation visited Brazilian mission institutions and projects, exploring how the Brazilians were tackling poverty, sexism, racism and environmental threats.
1993 - 2000s	Women’s Division was a founding member of the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, a cross-border coalition involving Canadian, Mexican and U.S. faith groups, labor unions and environmentalists working to address various health and safety, economic and environmental issues of maquiladora communities and workers. “Maquiladoras” are foreign-owned firms in Mexico at which imported parts are assembled by low-wage workers into products for export. These factories particularly hire women workers.
1994	The International Labor Rights Fund, founded by the Rev. Pharis Harvey, a United Methodist pastor, joined trade unions and human rights advocates in the the Rugmark Campaign—an effort to develop a consumer label for Indian, Nepalese and Pakistani hand-knotted carpets that agreed not to use child labor. Women’s Division was a founding member of the campaign and bought the first carpet made by a Rugmark-certified manufacturer. United Methodist Women members worked with Sen. Metzenbaum (Ohio) on legislation to end child labor in the rug industry.
1995	The World Trade Organization was launched. United Methodist Women members engaged in education and advocacy on how trade policies impact women, workers, the environment and communities of color.
1993	Mission study: <i>Global Economics: Seeking A Christian Ethic</i>
1994	United Methodist Women members sent birthday cards to the International Monetary Fund on its 50th birthday, saying “Fifty Years Is Enough!” The IMF imposed “structural adjustment” programs on poor nations that meant cuts in public services, increased care burdens for women and rising costs, negatively impacting women, youth and children. The IMF was inundated with postcards from members!

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1995	UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. The Women’s Division partnered with the Center of Concern to offer a year-long advance preparation training for community organizers from across the U.S. to maximize learning from and strategizing with peers at the conference. Women’s Division partnered with DAWN, a Third World Women’s Collective and other women’s groups from across the globe to impact the official UN outcome document around economic justice issues and organized workshops for activists. A meeting with the president of the World Bank lead to his immediate establishment of a gender advisory panel for the Bank to review and advise on the impacts of loans and Bank policies.
1996	During the Clinton administration, United Methodist Women members mobilized to oppose a “Welfare Reform” that would cut critical support to women and children. Nonetheless, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Action was signed by Clinton in 1996, fulfilling a campaign promise to “end welfare as we have come to know it”.
1998	Women’s Division published “Green Guidance – How to Plan Environmentally Responsible Meetings” illustrating how economic and environmental justice are connected, and that United Methodist Women members can use their purchasing power to advance multiple gender, racial, economic and environmental justice goals simultaneously. In the 2000s, this popular guide was expanded and a nationwide set of “Green Team” members were organized and trained to help members make spiritual, social, economic and practical change. These guides continue the 50-year legacy of advancing racial and economic justice through meeting arrangements.
1997 - 98	<p>Women’s Division served on the Strawberry Commission for Workers’ Rights. With General Board of Church and Society, they wrote to then Bishop Melvin Talbert of the California-Nevada Conference, seeking his support in contacting California’s Agricultural Labor Relations Board.</p> <p>In 1988, the Women’s Division joined in the statement, “Religious Leaders Call on Driscoll Strawberry Association to Work Constructively with the United Farm Workers.”</p>
1999	Women’s Division staff participated in the World Trade Organization meeting held in Seattle, Wash. They helped lead The United Methodist Church’s presence there as well as the global women’s caucus. They walked hand in hand with local United Methodist clergy and protestors to confront police in riot gear when the mayor and police chief declared a “No Speech Zone” in the downtown area. Women’s Division sponsored educational workshops with grassroots partners on the linkages between economic and environmental justice concerns in trade relationships. This presence in Seattle was the culmination of several years’ leadership in elaborating feminist economics addressing the gendered dimensions of trade policies. Women’s Division supported the creation of popular education tools to enable women in the U.S. and globally to advocate for more fair and sustainable policies. After Seattle, Women’s Division led in the creation of the Interfaith Working Group for Trade & Investment in Washington, D.C. – enabling various faith traditions to engage in sustained advocacy work on these topics for more than a decade.
1999	Women’s Division provided support to Immokalee farm workers who went on strike seeking decent pay from Florida’s eight largest tomato growers. This group later became the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), a current United Methodist Women partner.
2000’s	The Bible Women training in Asia included training on microcredit as a way of enabling rural women to generate income.
2001	Mission study: <i>Global Health</i>

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2001	Women's Division conducted a poverty survey across the U.S., gathering information from conference Social Action Coordinators. Diane Dujon and Ann Withorn (editors of <i>For Crying Out Loud: Women's Poverty in the United States</i>) did an analysis of the surveys, which was used to guide the organization's work on addressing issues of poverty.
2004	United Methodist Women brought successful resolutions on "Greed" and on "Privatization" to General Conference.
2004	General Conference endorsed the Mt. Olive Pickle boycott led by the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, and a boycott of Taco Bell, led by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. United Methodist Women supported these efforts through the National Farm Worker Ministry.
2005	The Women's Division created a media monitoring tool encouraging local units to analyze media for coverage of race and class representation in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. United Methodist Women has a long history of participatory documentation. In the early 1900s, deaconesses documented urban poverty. In the 1930s-1940s women documented lynchings. In the late 1990s they documented Black church burnings, and in the 2000s they documented hate crimes. United Methodist Women members participated in the "Repairers of the Breach" campaign to support conferences impacted by Hurricane Katrina in meeting their pledges.
2006 - 2007	Mission study: <i>Globalization</i> , by elmira Nazombe
2007	Women's Division board voted to launch the "Immigrant and Civil Rights Initiative," which included a focus on migrant women's economic security and human rights.
2008	The global financial crisis devastated the U.S. and global economy. United Methodist Women members, their churches and communities were profoundly impacted. Some lost homes due to the mortgage crisis. Others could not sell homes or retire. Many lost jobs. Members mobilized to provide material aid through soup kitchens and other resources. The Women's Division polled conferences to assess the impact and encourage action response magazine invited members to participate in "resilience circles" for mutual support and material solidarity.
2008	Women's Division board members signed a letter to Susan Ivey, CEO of Reynolds American Tobacco, calling on the company to meet with the Farm Labor Organizing Committee about working conditions in the tobacco fields in North Carolina. The board also decided to send a director to National Farm Worker Ministry meetings.
2009 - 2010	United Methodist Women members mobilized to support the Affordable Care Act, advocating for a "Medicare for All" framework based on United Methodist Church policy that affirms single-payer healthcare. While this version did not pass, the ACA opened the possibility for health insurance for 20 million newly insured people.
2012	United Methodist Women national office led work to create the Women in Migration Network (WIMN) at a gathering in Istanbul, Turkey, focused on global advocacy for the human rights of women in migration. A major focus is on labor rights for migrant women workers around the world.
2012 - 2013	Mission study: <i>Poverty</i>
2015	United Methodist Women members advocated at Leadership Development Days to protect funding for SNAP and TANF, key programs for low-income women and children including food subsidies.

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2018	The <i>Living Wage for All Campaign</i> was launched at Assembly 2018. United Methodist Women members joined with trade unions and other advocates for a rally, "Ohio Needs A Raise!" at the Ohio state house, advocating for a raise in the minimum wage.
2018	United Methodist Women became a national faith sponsor of the Poor People's Campaign, a National Call for Moral Revival. Members participated in 40 days of state advocacy and staff members joined over 100 in civil disobedience led by poor people at the nation's capital.
2018	At Conference Mission u, United Methodist Women members engaged in a postcard campaign as part of the Living Wage for All Campaign. They called on Wendy's to sign a fair food agreement with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) for dignity, wage increase and freedom from sexual harassment in the fields. UMW partnered with the National Farm Worker Ministry and CIW in this effort, gathering over 5,000 postcards that were delivered to Wendy's headquarters in Dublin, Ohio by UMW leaders and ecumenical partners.
2019	Mission u Action 2019 advocates for federal legislation for paid family and medical leave as a Living Wage issue.
See also:	<u><i>Living the Legacy: A Historical Timeline</i></u> , depicts the continuing journey of women in mission from 1869-2002.
See also:	Racial justice timeline; unitedmethodistwomen.org/rjtimeline
See also:	<i>Women United for Change: 150 Years in Mission</i> , by Ellen Blue. United Methodist Women, 2019