Program Advisory Group Focusses on Innovations, Economic Inequality at Spring Meeting

By Yvette Moore

The United Methodist Women Program Advisory Group focused on program innovation and economic inequality in the United States when members gathered for their annual spring meeting at Scarritt Bennett Center in Nashville, Tennessee, March 1-3.

Group members opened the weekend of meetings wearing black in solidarity with “Thursdays in Black,” an international women’s campaign confronting violence against women.

The Program Advisory Group’s focus on economic inequality previewed United Methodist Women’s 2018 “What About Our Money?” mission study. Carol Barton, United Methodist Women executive for community action, led the session, which began with a review of the Exodus story and manna in the wilderness, and Levitical instructions on Sabbath rest and the year of Jubilee. Group members discussed how God’s message of grace and “enough for all” embedded in these stories compared with economic principles based on scarcity that are impacting their families, local churches and communities.

The economic inequality session also tracked real family income growth by quintile in the United States from 1947 to 1979, when family incomes grew evenly across income levels; and from 1979 to 2012, when the middle quintile grew by 8 percent while the top quintile grew by 185 percent. The women discussed what these statistics meant for their communities. They named health care expenses, student loans, child care expenses, affordable housing and living on fixed incomes as some of the areas where they are seeing the impact of an economy based on scarcity rather than abundance.

“The message is the one we get from the manna story: When you take more than you need, it gets rotten and it sure is smelling up the place around here,” said Cynthia Rives of Central Texas Conference, a member of the Program Advisory Group and the board of directors.

Group members discussed how public policies drive economic inequality and ways women in their areas are taking action to address the issue in their communities.

- Crater Lake District United Methodist Women, Oregon-Idaho Conference, is working with Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon to address wage theft.
- Central Texas United Methodist Women invited Saru Jayaraman, director of Restaurant Opportunity Centers United and author of Behind the Kitchen Door, a Reading Program Book on wage theft, to our leaders and their assessments of the strength and range of views among the women in their Conferences.

So, conversations are going on across our membership about whether or not we can imagine the creative design of a church that is effective in mission and ministry, allowing all members to flourish in Christ, while its members reach different conclusions about what the Bible teaches with respect to LGBTQI persons and how the church can welcome them.

We are well equipped for this work with our experience of exploring the variety of perspectives we bring to matters we have studied. Conversations are not always comfortable, but they help us see each other as sisters on a journey of discipleship. May God bless us as we talk together and imagine a way forward.

Harriett Jane Olson is general secretary and CEO of United Methodist Women.
PAG Spring Meeting
(Continued from Page 1)

Ms. Jayaraman challenged the group to work against a federal government administrative ruling that would seize workers’ tips.

West Ohio United Methodist Women joined the March for Farm Workers with the National Farm Worker Ministry and Farm Labor Organizing Committee in August 2017.

Economic inequality is one of United Methodist Women’s four priority issues, along with climate justice, criminalization of communities of color and mass incarceration, and maternal and child health. United Methodist Women is advocating states and municipalities adopt living wage policies to ensure that all people who work full-time can support their families.

In other actions, group members continued their work on United Methodist Women’s strategic plan. The women separated into small groups for innovation sessions on United Methodist Women’s programming and outreach.

United Methodist Women chief executive officer Harriett Jane Olson set the tone for the group’s work in her address.

“God has loved and challenged United Methodist Women through structurings and restructurings, engaging the women of the church who have said ‘yes’ to representing God’s love in some of the most neglected places, for the health and thriving of women, children and youth. Work that calls from heart to heart, and mind to mind, across the years.

God is still at it,” Ms. Olson said.

“Through the strategic planning process, we have spent time lifting up and describing who we are, and whose we are through telling our own story and raising up the aspects of our work that form our identity. We are women formed and growing in faith. We are women who are still open, and even hungry, to learn and develop. We are women who are willing to take leadership surrounded by training and support. And we are women who put faith, hope and love into action—through dedicated, persistent service and dogged advocacy for and with marginalized people,” she said.

The Program Advisory Group counsels and serves as a liaison for conference, district and local United Methodist Women units. The group includes at least one representative from every conference. United Methodist Women’s 25-member board of directors is part of the 70-member Program Advisory Group.

United Methodist Women members, partners and friends are encouraged to continue supporting the Legacy Fund Endowment Campaign to carry the mission of United Methodist Women forward in making a difference in the lives of women, children and youth in the years to come. Together, we are building our legacy.

The Legacy Fund was created to provide a consistent source of income to train the next generation of members to respond to the unanticipated needs of the most marginalized in communities around the world and in the United States. We invite you to learn more about the Legacy Fund Endowment Campaign: unitedmethodistwomen.org/150.

Anissa Walker is executive for marketing and development communications for United Methodist Women.

Day of Giving 2018 Is a Success

By Anissa Walker

On March 23, 1869, eight women gathered at Tremont Street Methodist Episcopal Church in Boston, Massachusetts, and organized the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society, what would become United Methodist Women. They raised money to send a doctor, Clara Swain, and a teacher, Isabella Thoburn, as missionaries to India to serve the women of that nation.

Nearly 150 years later, on Friday, March 23, United Methodist Women members, partners and friends celebrated the Day of Giving 2018 and made it a huge success! We are also grateful to the 10 United Methodist Women staff members who volunteered their time (10 hours, from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.) to take donations for the Legacy Fund. In addition, we received donations online at unitedmethodistwomen.org/legacyfund. The final amount raised on Day of Giving was $270,643.54 for the Legacy Fund.

We are thankful to all who contributed to Day of Giving 2018 and made it a huge success! We are also grateful to the 10 United Methodist Women phone bank team with General Secretary Harriett Olson (top, third from right) and Treasurer Martha Knight (top, far right).

Yvette Moore is communications director for United Methodist Women.
Hesperian Guides are Helping Spanish-Speaking Women and Girls in the U.S. and Abroad

By Sarah Shannon

Since 1970, Hesperian Health Guides has produced accessible health information for distribution to underserved people throughout the world. With support from United Methodist Women, Hesperian is empowering women and girls in Latin America and the U.S. to take on issues of violence and gender inequality in their communities and workplaces.

Here, Executive Director Sarah Shannon shares how two new resources—Workers’ Guide to Health and Safety and Health Actions for Women: Practical Strategies to Mobilize for Change—are helping the women they serve.

Empowering Women and Girls in Latin America is a project aimed at helping women in Latin America and Spanish-speaking populations in the U.S. address issues of violence and gender inequality in their communities and workplaces by supporting transformative training, grassroots advocacy and action. To do this, we created Spanish-language adaptations of two new innovative resources—Workers’ Guide to Health and Safety and Health Actions for Women: Practical Strategies to Mobilize for Change—to support worker rights and women’s health advocates who are teaching women and girls how to demand their rights to health and safety. We share these resources in print and digital form through our networks to enable women to become leaders in their workplaces and communities.

After the Spanish translation of Health Actions for Women (Guía práctica para promover la salud de las mujeres) was completed, our Spanish-language editorial team edited the translated draft to ensure simple, accessible language and resolve cross-cultural and linguistic issues of translation, especially for the culturally sensitive topics related to gender. Hesperian coordinated with 20 organizations to field test and review the guide in Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and the U.S. Hesperian identified field testing and review partners by reaching out to U.S. and Latin American community-based organizations that focus on women’s and youth’s reproductive and sexual health. Each organization chose several chapters of suggested activities to read, review and carry out, using our packets of designed and illustrated chapters and accompanying guidelines. Hesperian staff reviewed and analyzed the large amount of feedback generated and revised the drafts accordingly. The final publication included stories and examples from around Latin America contributed by and from the work of the field-testing and review partners.

In field-testing Health Actions for Women, women said not only was the information helpful and clear, it also made them feel more empowered to be advocates for women’s health and rights in a variety of contexts. One field-testing participant in Guatemala commented, “Since sexuality is a topic that isn’t openly discussed in all societies, this chapter [on sexual health] provides ideal, clear ways to address it. Personally, I feel that the content will be very useful for me to promote a conversation about sexuality among diverse groups of people.”

For the Spanish-language adaptation of Workers’ Guide to Health and Safety, Hesperian translated the chapters on chemical dangers into Spanish and then completed a Spanish-language training curriculum on chemical hazards for garment workers, now available online. It includes three training modules: Spanish translation of the book’s chemicals’ chapter, an appendix explaining how to identify a wide range of chemicals to limit harm from their use, and a card game to make learning about hazards and worker cooperation fun. The modules also focus on how women can be leaders and advocates in their workplaces.

The Los Angeles Garment Worker Center tested our materials during trainings with low-wage Spanish-speaking garment workers. The editorial team then revised the training guides, based on the training experience and feedback, to create the final version. Women garment workers who participated in trainings presented in the Workers Guide to Health and Safety benefited from the content and are sharing what they learned with their co-workers and families. Women workers and the grassroots organizations that serve them are using and sharing these guides and information widely, both in the U.S. and in Latin America—these resources have been viewed online more than 4,000 times by people in Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina, Venezuela, El Salvador, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Spain and the U.S.

We are so grateful to United Methodist Women for supporting Hesperian’s unique collaborative process to develop, test and produce these Spanish-language editions to ensure that they reflect the voices and lived experiences of women in Latin America.

Sarah Shannon is the executive director of Hesperian Guides.
Gracious Acts

Florida United Methodist Women Members Honor Teachers and Remember Parkland

By Pamela Davis

Last February members of United Methodist Women at First United Methodist Church Boca Raton in Boca Raton, Florida, held a recognition program to honor and thank the educators and staff at Methodist Early Childhood Education (MECE) Preschool and Kindergarten who daily share their love with children. MECE is a non-profit school operating on the East Campus of our church. “For the Love of Children...Recognizing MECE” was the theme and we planned this special day for Valentine’s week.

As president of our United Methodist Women group, I began the program in prayer and the lighting of a candle, remembering the unthinkable act of gun violence on Valentine’s Day at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Seventeen people were fatally shot including three educators who gave their lives protecting their students. The school is in our district and many of the attendees shared their personal experiences of people they know in the Parkland community.

Each participant was given a paper heart and invited to write a name of a teacher who helped them. As president of our United Methodist Women group, I believe that reflections and prayers are just the beginning steps in remembering these victims. We need to advocate for children by contacting legislators both at the state and U.S. capital to stop gun violence. Our young students have no voice or vote, but we can advocate for them with our bodacious voices as we stand up and speak out to our elected officials.

By imploring “We Must Put Children First!” I urged us all to take action. We had a wonderful presentation by Cathy Herschelman, MECE director, who shared an overview of the school, a timeline of its history, goals for the school and suggestions on ways that our unit can get involved. Members of the staff and a former student concluded the program with a song. The Susanna Circle, under the coordination of Suzanne Reeves and Debbie Woolsey, our vice-president, made “thank you” boxes filled with treats for teachers and staff members. We enjoyed special Valentine-themed refreshments courtesy of United Methodist Women members Karin Nordlander and Jane Walters.

Pamela Davis is the president of United Methodist Women at First United Methodist Boca Raton in Boca Raton, Florida.

Great Plains Conference Creates a Legacy Quilt

By Marilyn Zehring

For the past year the Great Plains Conference has been working on a legacy quilt. Each of our 17 districts made a square, including those that represent the former Nebraska and Kansas East and Kansas West Conferences. Carol Benninga, a member in Kansas, received all the squares and put the quilt together. She also made the large United Methodist Women [rectangle] at the top center of the quilt. We are compiling a brochure to go with it, and it will be displayed at our annual meeting, district meetings and annual conference.

Marilyn Zehring is the legacy coordinator of the Great Plains Conference.

Have an interesting story for Gracious Acts? Contact United Methodist Women News co-editor Julia Chance at Jchance@unitedmethodistwomen.org.
**Gracious Acts**

**Love Circle Remembers Veterans for the Holiday**

Members of the Love Circle of United Methodist Women at the Trinity United Methodist Church in North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, show gift-filled Christmas stockings they made and distributed to veterans.

By Linda Welsh

The Love Circle of United Methodist Women of the Trinity United Methodist Church in North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, started a new ministry for Christmas of 2016. The project was to sew Christmas stockings, which were then filled with gifts for veterans during the holidays. This project assisted a mission project already established in the church—the Armed Services Assistance Program. This program provides aid to veterans and their families.

The idea originated when a member wintering at the Trinity United Methodist Church presented a program during the meeting explaining a group called “Sew Many Blessings” that she was a part of at her home church, Chippewa United Methodist Church in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. The Love Circle agreed that this was a project they would like to pursue.

The Love Circle purchased some Christmas-themed fabric, while some fabrics were donated by women from the congregation. The project was fun for the Love Circle and there was a job for everyone. Those with sewing machines brought them on work day. The ladies cut the fabric into stocking shapes, pinned and sewed them together and ironed them. The time spent together was fun and productive.

When the stockings were completed, the Love Circle collected gift items such as pens, candy and personal care items. A gift certificate to a local store was also included. A tag attached to each stocking indicated who made it. The stockings were then delivered to the Armed Services Assistance Program who distributed them to the veterans.

This was a labor of love. Those completing the stockings enjoyed the fellowship shared and the veterans appreciated the gift and will be able to enjoy the stockings for many years to come.

Linda Welsh is a member of the Love Circle of United Methodist Women at Trinity United Methodist Church in North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

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**In Focus: Estella Wallace**

From school books to keeping our books, this former teacher chairs our finance committee.

**By Michelle Bearden**

Estella “Stell” Wallace, the new chair of the United Methodist Women finance committee, has a little secret to share.

“Every month when I reconcile my checkbook, I do a little happy dance,” says Wallace, 65, of the Pacific Northwest Conference.

Now she has a daunting challenge ahead of her: overseeing the organization’s $17 million budget. She says she’s got two secret weapons in her corner: “A good head on my shoulders and a daughter-in-law who is a CPA,” Wallace says with a laugh.

Don’t underestimate Wallace, either. The retired educator brings a wealth of experience to United Methodist Women, starting with 40 years as a teacher. With multiple degrees—special education, elementary education, working with at-risk youth and curriculum development—her career spanned teaching kindergartners to high schoolers. She says her main focus, middle school humanities, was a challenge not for the faint of heart.

“I loved it,” she said of her career. “You are in the trenches in influencing young lives.”

Like all working parents, Wallace had to learn how to balance her profession and a busy family life. She and her husband of 44 years, a now-retired firefighter, raised two children who have followed in their parents’ footsteps. Her son is a firefighter; her daughter is a school principal.

Church has always been a priority for Wallace. She likes to say she was literally born into the denomination, as she made her entrance into the world at the Methodist hospital in Dallas, Texas. As a longtime member of Ellensberg First United Methodist Church in Ellensberg, Washington, she is a past director of Ellensberg Community Clothing Center Ministries, a former board member of Tacoma Community House (a United Methodist Women national institution) and a volunteer for Cold Weather Shelter, a multichurch local program that provides sleeping quarters to the homeless when temperatures dip too low.

Her work with United Methodist Women took off after her kids graduated from high school, including a stint with the jurisdiction leadership team and serving as a member of the committee on nominations. Now she moves into a larger role in her new position with United Methodist Women’s finance committee, covering the organization’s budget, property and endowment administration.

Others may be daunted by the responsibilities of the job. For all the Mission Giving generated by United Methodist Women, Wallace and committee will oversee how the board approves giving for mission, including national mission institutions, international mission projects and scholarships. The committee also oversees the investments and use of the Legacy Fund and other endowments given by our foremothers.

“We’ve been around 150 years. We’ve proven that we’re efficient, good with the dollar and we have staying power,” Wallace says. “Yes, our assets and our budget may seem staggering, but I’m always humbled by what good stewards of money we’ve been historically. There are so many organizations today vying for your dollar, so we have to continue to show that we are a responsible, viable group that will make a meaningful impact with your donation.”

Wallace believes the organizational skills she honed as an educator, mother and community and church volunteer will serve her well in her four-year term. She’s a big believer in teamwork and the strength that comes when people join together for a unified mission.

“I’m a lifelong learner and lifelong teacher. That didn’t stop with retirement,” she says. “So many people say they wish they could do something, but it stops there. You have to take that next step and be intentional about it. I’m lucky to have found an organization where I can have a voice and make a difference.”

Michelle Bearden is former religion reporter for The Tampa Tribune and WFLA-TV and is now a freelance writer specializing in faith and values. She’s a two-time winner of the national Supreme Religion Writer of the Year Award from the Religion Newswriters Association.
Holston Conference Addresses Human Trafficking

Attendees learned how to recognize the signs of modern-day slavery and how to help its victims.

By Corrina Sisk-Casson

Most Americans assume that slavery ended in the United States in 1865. Yet, it continues today. Nellie Bragg, an active member of United Methodist Women, knows all too well about the subject. “It has been a topic for United Methodist Women for a number of years,” says Bragg who is a member at Middlebrook Pike United Methodist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee. For the last nine years specifically, human trafficking has been a national mission priority for United Methodist Women.

Bragg was among a group of clergy and laity who attended a conference on human trafficking sponsored by the Holston Conference United Methodist Women and Correctional Ministries at Cokesbury United Methodist Church, also in Knoxville, last February. Representatives from Hope for Justice, a rescue organization for victims of trafficking, were the featured speakers. Hope for Justice has offices in Nashville, Tennessee; Manchester, United Kingdom; and Stavanger, Norway, and helps people in other countries as well.

Two presenters at the evening session discussed how people get caught up in modern-day slavery. Richard Schoebert, a former CIA agent who is now a Hope for Justice team leader in the U.S. office, explained that 100 minors are sex-trafficked each month. Seventy-seven percent of targeted girls are under the age of 13. He explained that sex trafficking is a $1 billion industry because it is easy to keep using people over and over again.

Isaac Jones, regional development manager, said traffickers manipulate people who are vulnerable. Youth who are runaways, people who come from abusive homes, people who want to be loved and those who live in low-income areas are especially targeted.

Schoebert explained a simple tactic that traffickers use to lure college students. The students are approached to attend a special party. They tell the student that their company is hosting a party, and they need people to fill in the space. They will pay them a couple of hundred dollars to go. Once the student arrives at the party, they are trapped.

People are also turned into labor slaves. They are promised a better life in the U.S., only to find themselves in debt to those who brought them here. Once a victim is in the U.S., traffickers use threats and lies to keep them. Traffickers use schemes such as taking their passports, telling the victim that they must pay for everything and are in debt to their abuser. They even resort to physical abuse. The victim feels that they don’t have any choices. Often, they don’t know they can get help.

Beth Green from First Broad Street United Methodist Church in Kingsport, Tennessee, said she only thought of human trafficking in the sex trade. “I had no idea it also involved laborers,” she said. “Both presenters knew their topic and conveyed it in a way that helped us understand how great the impact is on these dear souls affected by human trafficking,” she said.

Hope for Justice is one of several groups that help people escape human trafficking and then works on helping them overcome trauma. Bragg explained how the church can help.

“It is my belief that intervention [should be implemented] in existing conditions before someone is a victim of human trafficking,” Bragg said.

Examples of intervention she gave included accessible health care, parenting and guidance classes, food programs for those who are struggling, housing options for those who are in need and school employees who are trained to recognize those who might become victims of trafficking. All of these examples, she said, provide “a better option as a way out of an already difficult situation, signs for which we should be vigilant in order to interrupt a trafficking situation.”

Corrina Sisk-Casson is a member at Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church in Johnson City, Tennessee. She was consecrated as a deaconess of The United Methodist Church during United Methodist Women Assembly 2018 in Columbus, Ohio.

A Freedom Wall, with the open padlocks to represent those who have been rescued by Hope for Justice in the UK. The U.S. Hope for Justice office is in the process of designing something similar.
United Methodist Women Initiates Dialogue for Peace and Unity in the Democratic Republic of Congo

By Betty Kazadi Musau

The United Methodist Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo continues to work toward reconciliation and healing between indigenous Pygmies and Bantus, the majority ethnic group in the Tanganyika province.

The church has been leading peacebuilding efforts in districts of the Tanganyika Conference, including the villages of Manono, Kabalo and Nyunzu, where there has been conflict between Pygmies and Bantus since 2013.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 630,000 people have been internally displaced due to violent clashes between the Twa (also known as Pygmies) and the Bantu (mainly of the Luba ethnic group) and the Bantu (mainly of Tanganyika province since December 2016.

Last month, the U.N. refugee agency warned of “a humanitarian disaster of extraordinary proportions” in the DRC as Tanganyika “plunges further into violence, triggering spiraling displacement and human rights abuses,” said UNHCR spokesperson Andrej Mahecic.

United Methodist Women in Tanganyika, particularly in Nyunzu, has been welcoming Pygmies into the church and community. The women’s group also has initiated dialogue between the two groups and has been leading vocational training to empower both Pygmy women and Bantu women.

“Coming together with Pygmies again in The United Methodist Church is a powerful sign of love, hope and peace in Nyunzu,” said Muzinga Bahati, chairperson of United Methodist Women for the district.

The skills training includes cooking, basic hygiene, sewing, knitting, nutrition and soap making. One of the goals is to help Pygmy women meet their basic needs so that they can stop their nomadic lifestyles, which can be especially difficult for children who aren’t able to attend school.

Gertrude Mutumpe, who led the soap-making workshop, said soap had been coming from companies in big cities, often taking weeks to get washing and laundry soap.

“Now, with United Methodist Women’s soap-making program, women make soap themselves. They use their own soap in their homes and they sell it to generate income. It helps to apportion in the local church, [support] school children and care for the family,” she said.

With these church initiatives, “there is a co-habitation between Pygmies and Bantus,” said Kisimba Nyongololo, a Pygmy man. “Tranquility and peace are coming.”

Ferdinand Nkulu Banza, pastor in charge of Kisima United Methodist Church in the Nyunzu district, said the programs are fostering respect within the community.

“Knowing each and everyone’s limits and respecting each other are values to be reinforced in the family and Nyunzu community,” he said. “Peace, unity and respect are values to be promoted in the church for Bantus’ and Pygmies’ development.”

The Rev. Kongolo Muzila Nkulu Francois, a 70-year-old father of eight, is assigned to village mission and evangelism in the Kilwa village, which is 55 miles from Nyunzu. The United Methodist Church there has almost 300 Pygmy members.

“I love to reach out to them. They are special people. They do not read but they are good at listening,” Kongolo said. Love and determination is required to minister to Pygmies.

Sometimes, I wake at 2:00 a.m. and walk from Nyunzu to Kilwa and reach Kilwa in the morning. They are children of God and God needs their soul,” Kongolo said.

“As a pastor shepherding them, there is one Bible, one hymnal book. I read the Bible for them and teach them songs,” he said.

Kongolo hopes to one day have a Bible study program and provide audio Bibles to those in the remote area.

“Any initiative for Bible study or a manual for Sunday school for a children's ministry will empower Pygmy families and children who are growing. [The efforts would] strengthen indigenous people, community building and transformation,” he said.

The Rev. Betty Kazadi Musau is the communicator of North Katanga Episcopal Area in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

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Mission Study Books

Look to these United Methodist Women Mission Study selections—for adults, children and youth—for spiritual and social justice growth and understanding.

Embracing Wholeness: Earth Perspective for Covenantal Living
By Jessica Stonecypher
Study explores the ways God has called us to live in covenantal relationship with all of creation and challenges readers to work toward stronger and healthier relationships with creation, their communities, themselves, and God. $10.00

What About Our Money? A Faith Response
By Susan K. Taylor
Study explores our relationship with money, the money choices available to us and how we individually and collectively respond to economic inequalities in light of our faith. $10.00

Is It Just Money? Our Dollars, God’s Economy: A Youth Study
By Anna Burkett and Tom Burkett
Study is designed to engage youth in an exploration of money as it relates to faith and justice. $10.00

Money Matters: A Study for Children
By Denise Snyder
Study endeavors to teach children about the concept of money, the importance of generosity and how God intends for us to use money as an expression of love for others. $10.00

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SISTERHOOD of GRACE
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$10.00 Stock #M3321 Spanish Stock #M3322 Korean Stock #M3323 Accompanying Mini Date Book $1.50 Stock #M3324