



## **HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL MISSION INSTITUTIONS**

### **BEGINNINGS**

When the Methodist and Evangelical United Brethren Churches united to form The United Methodist Church in 1968, they brought together a rich history of women organized for mission in both denominations.

It was the dramatic stories of the needs of women and children overseas brought back by missionaries and their wives that brought about the organization of the earliest women's foreign missionary society. It was the equally dramatic stories of need among the women and children of the United States, especially the freed women of the South, that brought forth the organizations for home missions. But gaining the permission of the "church fathers" was no easy task. In each of the predecessor organizations, the women were dependent upon the authorization of the general church (the General Conferences) to form national organizations. Early appeals to become a part of the general church mission boards were repeatedly rebuffed.

The Women's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church was formed in 1869. By 1939 when three Methodist denominations (The Methodist Episcopal Church, The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church) merged to form The Methodist Church, women had organized foreign and home missionary societies in each of them. During the same period—beginning in 1875—women had organized similar missionary societies in the three denominations (United Brethren in Christ, Evangelical Association, and the United Evangelical Church) which merged to form the Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1946.

In the early days mission work was carried out almost entirely by volunteers. But the need for trained personnel became apparent. In all branches of Methodism and in the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, the deaconess program was begun around the turn of the century in order to meet this need. It was based on the work being done in Europe at the time. Several training schools were instrumental in establishing and developing many of the early mission projects which have grown into today's national mission institutions (community centers, schools and mission colleges, residential childcare centers, women's residences, and mission complexes.)

With Methodist church union in 1939, six separate women's mission organizations were united to form the Women's Division of Christian Service. Local church mission units were known as the Women's Society of Christian Service and the Wesleyan Service Guild. The counterpart in the Evangelical United Brethren Church was the Women's Division of the Board of Missions and local units were known as the Women's Society of World Service.

The women recruited and sent missionaries and deaconesses to mission work around the world. They began Sunday schools, kindergartens, clinics, schools, and homes for orphans. They carried out mission education among their constituency, and raised funds to support their mission

endeavors. They built buildings and purchased and maintained property. They assigned project directors and set up local advisory boards. Fund for staff and programs were provided by the Women's Society of Christian Service through the Women's Division. Administrative ties between the Women's Division and the mission projects were very direct, close and supportive.

The following are some present-day mission institutions which were some of the earliest begun by women organized for mission:

- In 1870, the women of the Methodist Episcopal Church established the Chinese Home in San Francisco to rescue immigrant Chinese women and children from a life of prostitution. Later as social conditions changed, the work shifted to care for orphans and children from broken homes. Now known as **Gum Moon**, the ministry has been to provide a home and resources for young women.
- In Ybor City, Tampa, Florida, a Wolff Mission School was opened in 1894 by the Women's Missionary Council for the Cubans at a time when Cuban children were not admitted to the public schools. One month later another school was opened in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Valdez in West Tampa. By 1916 both schools had changed to settlement work. They continue in ministry today as **Cornerstone Family Ministries**.
- In 1912 the first Christian community center was established in a Black community when Mary DeBardeleben opened Galloway Hall in Augusta, Georgia. The name was later changed to Bethlehem Center. The Conference Women of North and South Georgia provided funding for her salary and her work. An inter-racial advisory board and inter-racial staff were responsible for program planning from the onset. Today, it is known as **New Bethlehem Community Center**.
- Millie Perkins, a deaconess in the United Brethren Church, went to New Mexico where she founded a day school and Summer school at Veladre in 1912. Five years later there were four mission schools where there had been no public schools. Her work provided the foundation for the establishment of **McCurdy Ministries Community Center**, Espanola Hospital, and the Northern New Mexico Group Ministry, all of which continue in service today.
- In 1912 the Women's Missionary Council sent a deaconess to assist the pastor at the church at Bayou Blue, Louisiana. In 1919 Centenary funds made possible the purchase of land and an old mansion which was converted into a Wesley House. Churches were organized in many scattered communities. In 1922 the MacDonell French Mission School was established to meet the need for training leadership. Later as social and educational needs in Southern Louisiana changed, the school was changed to a home for orphans and children from broken homes. **MacDonell U.M. Children's Services** now serves children with severe social, emotional and behavioral problems at the original, much enlarged Houma, Louisiana campus.



## TURNING POINTS

Up until 1964 the National Mission Institutions enjoyed stable national policies and administration and centralized support services. The Women's Division recruited and assigned personnel; provided funds for program, personnel, property maintenance and new construction; provided central accounting, promotion and public relations; and engaged in fundraising and education within the support community.

During the 1960s, many changes occurred both within the church and within American society as a whole, which significantly impacted the relationship between the projects and the national organization. The following are some of the key influencing events and factors from the 1960s to the present.

- 1964. General Conference called for a major restructure of the Methodist Board of Missions that involved the transfer of the mission work of the Women's Division of Christian service to the newly organized World and National Divisions. As a move to eliminate dual administration, (Women's Division and general church) the women's work was combined with the mission program of the general church. The Women's Division continued its fundraising, mission education and property management. It still held ownership to 154 mission properties, while it began to make annual appropriations to World and National Divisions, which took on program administration of the work, and to the Joint Commission on Education and Cultivation.
- 1967. All community centers were directed to become incorporated. This later became the policy for all related institutions. Local project boards were changed from advisory to policymaking. Boards of Directors hired the executive director of the institutions and were encouraged to place priority on ethnic minority candidates. One result of the change was that there were less Methodists as executive directors and as members of the boards of directors. In some cases, there was not only less Methodist leadership, but a diminished sense of Methodist history and connection.
- 1968. The Methodist and the Evangelical United Brethren Churches united to form The United Methodist Church. Administration of all mission projects was brought together under one board.
- 1970. Former Women's Division institutions became eligible for General Advance Special support.
- 1974/5. The Women's Division initiated a prime lease policy with the mission institutions which were housed in Women's Division property. The first four-year lease took effect in January 1975.

- 1980. By action of the General Conference, the new *Book of Discipline* included legislation intended to develop a more effective relationship between the institutions and the annual conference. Paragraph 730.5(c) states that annual conferences are to establish a sub-committee on Institutional Ministries related to the National Division under the Committee on Parish and Community Development to parallel the other sub-committees on Church and Community Ministry, Congregational Development, Town and Country Ministries, and Urban Ministries. No effort was made to implement this legislation and no annual conference established such a sub-committee.
- 1984/5. Both the National and Women's Divisions developed policy statements regarding the role of Institutional Ministries in a national mission strategy.

One outcome of these policy decisions was the establishment of an ongoing Joint Committee on Institutional Ministries with members from both the National and Women's Divisions. The new arena provided opportunities for joint consideration of concerns related to both program and property, holistic planning, and evaluation of Institutional Ministries called Extension Staff.

Another outcome was the development of a covenant relationship between the General Board of Global Ministries and local boards of directors of related mission institutions. The Covenant, with input from the institutions, the Joint Committee and the National Division directors and staff, was to be ratified with each institution. It clarifies how the United Methodist Church as a whole is in mission through National Mission Institutions. The Covenant proposes to:

- Reaffirm mutual commitment to mission by establishing a closer relationship between the National/Women's Divisions and the National Mission Institutions with an understanding of the institutions as centers of Christian mission committed to the priorities and strategy of the National Division.
  - Clarify and delineate the responsibilities and areas of accountability and authority of the National Division and the institutions.
  - Clarify and define the meaning of being a National Mission Institution as different from other church agencies by strategic deployment of personnel, finances, property, and other national mission resources.
- 1996. General Board of Global Ministries restructured and was organized around eight program units, representing the major functions whereby the General Board of Global ministries can provide leadership in globalizing the mission of The United Methodist Church. There would no longer be a World Division and a National Division.
  - Also, in 1996, the Joint Committee was dissolved, and decision making for National Mission Institutions came through the Women's Division Board of Directors' Committee

structure. One half of the Women's Division Board was assigned to a National Ministries Committee, and the other half assigned to an International Ministries Committee. However, the National Ministries Committee staff work was cooperative between the Women's Division staff and the Institutional Ministries staff.

- 2010. The Women's Division assumed administrative responsibility for relationship with National Mission Instructions and hired the Institutional Ministries staff to administer the National Mission Institution portfolio.
- 2012. General Conference approved a proposal for the Women's Division to structurally separate from the General Board of Global Ministries, while both organizations would continue to engage in mutual areas of mission.
- 2012. The Women's Division officially changed its name to "United Methodist Women."

## **TODAY**

There are approximately 90 National Mission Institutions in covenant relationship with the United Methodist Women national office (hereinafter referred to as the national office). They are located in cities, small towns throughout the United States, including Puerto Rico. They provide services to all persons without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sexual orientation and political persuasion. They are ministries with the poor, elderly, women, children, youth, families and communities.

The national office provides the institutions with access to United Methodist Women (local, district, conference), networking opportunities, technical and financial resources, and staff consultation. Approximately 50 percent of the institutions are housed in property owned by the national office.

National Mission Institutions receive financial support from church sources, government grants, private foundations, corporations, individuals, endowments and local fundraising efforts. Two-thirds of the institutions are members of local United Ways.

Programs and services are flexible and respond to the changing needs of the local communities. The ministries seek to empower those who are in need, to witness to Christ's hope in the midst of despair and know life more abundantly.

