

United Methodist Women Sunday

Here are three proposed Orders of Worship, including Sermons, to use for United Methodist Women Sunday services. Please feel free to use them as is, or revise to meet your needs.

The following are summaries of each of the three services:

United Methodist Women: Sharing Our Story

In 2019 United Methodist Women will celebrate our 150th Anniversary! What a story we have to tell! What a legacy we leave! Our history is rich with mission to women, children and youth at home and around the world. We continue to lead the way in mission work and advocacy today. And we look to the future of United Methodist Women with excitement.

United Methodist Women – Women with a Purpose

The purpose of our organization should be in the forefront of everything we do as United Methodist Women. We have a rich history going back to 1869 and it is a history that is worth retelling from time to time. It helps remind us of what we are all about and the work we are called to do by God as United Methodist Women. It can also help to motivate us to keep our path as we strive to be the voice and support for women, children and youth all over the world.

Distinctive Mission

The sermon identifies those members of United Methodist Women who are sitting in church. It asks the congregation what they know about United Methodist Women and gives a brief history of commitment and nurture to women, children and youth. It explains the relationship between being distinctive as a Christian and why United Methodist Women do the work they do.

Eight United Methodist Women-supported missions are described: Henderson Settlement, KY; Joaquina Nhanala, Mozambique; Neighborhood Center of Camden, NJ; preschool in Liberia; Say No to Poverty, Monrovia; Deaconess Jeanne Roe Smith, Wesley Foundation Serving UCLA, CA; Moore Community House, Biloxi, MS and Wesley Community Service Center, Portsmouth, VA.

In conclusion, the congregation is asked if they are living a life of distinction.

United Methodist Women Sunday
Gathering for Worship

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

Call to Worship

Leader: The organized unit of United Methodist Women shall be a community of women whose PURPOSE is to know God.

People: We celebrate the global sisterhood and brotherhood made possible through mission.

Leader: Those who experience freedom as whole persons through Christ cannot hide their light under a bushel.

People: We are here to celebrate and witness the United Methodist Women's historical commitment to ministry with women and children and youth.

Leader: Strive to develop a creative, supportive fellowship to undergird the historical commitment to ministry.

People: We pledge ourselves to renewed discipleship as followers of Christ.

All: We pledge ourselves to renewed discipleship in Christ to expand concepts of mission through the global ministries of the church.

Opening Hymn

For the Healing of the Nations

UMH 428

Opening Prayer

God of justice, let our work and love be a memorial, an everlasting sign, a legacy for the future, so that all our efforts to put faith, hope and love into action for women, children and youth will be realized in our world both now and in the future. Amen

Scripture Lesson	Ephesians 4:1-7	
	Matthew 18:20	
Sermon	United Methodist Women: Sharing Our Story	
Hymn	Here I Am, Lord	UMH 593
Prayers of the People		
The Lord's Prayer		
The Presentation of God's Tithes and Our Offerings		
Doxology		
Hymn	Pass It On	UMH 572
Dismissal With Blessing		

United Methodist Women: Sharing Our Story

(written by Karen McElfish)

It was a dark and stormy night, March 23, 1869, when a small group of women gathered at Tremont Methodist Episcopal Church in Boston, MA to hear Mrs. William Butler and Mrs. Edwin Parker speak. They were the wives of missionaries in India, home on furlough, and told of the desperate needs of women in India. Male doctors could not treat women patients. Schooling for girls was almost non-existent. The need for trained women, to provide education and medical care, was great.

The assembled women were so moved by the plight of the women in India, they organized the Methodist Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. Their stated goal was "for the purpose of engaging and uniting Christian teachers and Bible women in foreign lands". They each pledged to contribute 2 cents per week, made personal sacrifices, and by November 1869 funds were raised to send Isabella Thoburn, an educator, and Dr. Clara Swain, a doctor, to India. Ms. Thoburn founded a school in Lucknow, which expanded to become Isabella Thoburn College, the first women's college in Asia, which is still in existence today. Dr. Swain established the first women's hospital in Asia, also still serving patients today.

And with this small band of women the foundation for United Methodist Women was laid!

Methodist women in Baltimore, MD had formed the Ladies China Missionary Society in 1848, to support single women in mission to China. By 1858 they paid for 3 single women, including sisters Sarah and Beulah Woolston, to run a school for lower-class and abandoned girls in Foochow, China. In 1869, the Ladies China Missionary Society merged with the newly formed Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. The sisters were adopted and recognized as its official missionaries.

In 1875, the Woman's Missionary Association of the United Brethren Church was formed. Lizzie Hoffman, one of the women who helped found the association, was convinced through a night of prayer that the women should support mission

work. Thus in 1877, Emily Beekin was sent to Sierra Leone as the Association's first missionary. Then in 1878, women of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South founded their Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. They sent Lochie Rankin to China as their first missionary.

Without the woman's mission organizations in the church, mission work would not have had such strong support. The women were dedicated to mission work in their own communities and throughout the world. Between 1869 and 1903 missionaries were ultimately sent to India, China, Mexico, South America, Bulgaria, Sierra Leone, Japan, Italy, Malaysia, Korea, and the

Philippines. Schools and orphanages were founded, medical clinics established, English taught, and the work of Bible women supported.

Women advocated for mission work in the United States and addressed issues ranging from help for freed black people in the South, Mexicans living in the southwest, Native Americans, Chinese Immigrant women, and Mormon women suffering from polygamy. They also advocated for social justice issues such as anti-poll tax legislation, expansion of Social Security coverage to domestic and agricultural workers, anti-lynching laws, and equality without discrimination based on “race, creed, or class”. The first Charter of Racial Policies was adopted by the Woman’s Division in 1952.

Improving lives through education was important. In 1885 the Haven Industrial School was established in Savannah, Georgia. In 1888 the Immigrant Girls Home was established in New York. (It is now the Alma Mathews House, a guest house and meeting place operated by United Methodist Women.) In 1890 the Harwood School in Albuquerque, New Mexico was founded to educate Hispanic children. In 1897 the Sue Bennett Memorial School opened, to educate mountain children in Southeastern Kentucky. These are just a few of the many schools and institutions our foremothers have supported.

Throughout our history, women have come together to grow in faith, learn about the needs of women, children and youth, and reach out to others in their own communities and around the world. They were motivated by the stories of missionaries, stories shared in missionary magazines, helping identify causes in need and to raise money to support. “Heathen Woman’s Friend”, published by the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society from 1869 to 1896, was the first such magazine. “The Methodist Woman”, published from 1940 to 1968, and “World Evangel”, published from 1947 to 1968, merged to form “Response” magazine in 1969.

Ultimately the woman’s missionary societies from 8 denominations combined over time to become United Methodist Women, which in 1973 became the women’s mission organization of The United Methodist Church. Our history is one of generations of women working to help change lives of women, children and youth at home and in foreign lands, addressing such issues as child labor, poverty, immigration, migrant labor, racial discrimination, and inequality for women.

What are our stories today? We have expanded our advocacy to include threats to the environment, and continue to work on issues of homelessness, immigration, lack of affordable health care, racial divisions, public education, the elderly, children and youth, domestic violence, human trafficking, and women’s roles in society. Our work today supports almost 100 National Mission Institutions, and International Projects in more than 110 counties. As well, we support countless local and regional projects.

Cornerstone Family Ministries, in Tampa, Florida, helps families struggling with poverty. Their Rosa Valdez Early Childhood Learning Center focuses on the overall well-being of the children, including identifying developmental delays and advocating for early intervention, to providing year-round learning opportunities for pre-Kindergarten children, who would not otherwise have opportunities over the summer. They provide voluntary pre-Kindergarten during the school year, transitioning into vacation Bible school during the summer. Cornerstone's Children's Nutrition Connection helps 130 other child care centers in and around Tampa plan and serve nutritious meals and nutrition education for 28,000 children. Many of these children live in "food deserts", where few stores sell fresh fruits and vegetables. They also teach nutrition classes for the parents of the enrolled children. Cornerstone's Children's Faith Connection makes use of local churches for funding and volunteers, and connects children with local churches in their community. We support the work of Cornerstone through our Mission Giving.

Global Health Action works to train and provide birthing kits for more than 60 traditional birth attendants in Haiti. These attendants receive monthly training from a clinic nurse and a community health nurse on safe delivery instructions. They receive a regular supply of clean delivery kits and report on the number of deliveries they have assisted. These attendants provide the only support for thousands of rural women and infants unable to access health care. We support their work through our Mission Giving.

United Methodist Women in Summer County, West Virginia help feed children in their community. Seventy eight percent of the students qualify for free meals, but the county feeds all children. However, needy children have limited food on weekends and vacations. United Methodist Women of Hinton First UMC help fill the gap with "Yummy Bags" of nutritious food to take home for the weekend. Once a month they also include a book. And the women volunteer at the local school, reading to the children. In Bluefield, United Methodist Women at Trinity UMC provide food backpacks, containing only foods that can be prepared in a microwave, since many of the children are unsupervised when they prepare meals. They also provide clothing, car seats, cribs and mattresses through Mary's Cradle.

On April 26, 2014 at Assembly in Louisville, Kentucky, thousands of United Methodist Women marched alongside local community members and advocates, to stand with low-income neighbors on the city's west side. They called for living wages, affordable housing and access to healthy food. They advocated for economic justice, policies of inclusion, and equal opportunities for all, and marched to demonstrate commitment to undo unjust policies. United Methodist Women put Faith, Hope and Love into Action.

These are just a few of the many, many projects we as United Methodist Women support, through our funds and our time. What are your stories? Perhaps you volunteer at an after-

school program, tutoring and helping children with their homework. Perhaps you make layette kits to be distributed by the United Methodist Committee on Relief. Perhaps you march for climate justice or fair immigration policies. Perhaps you attend United Methodist Day at General Assembly to advocate for good government. Perhaps you teach vacation Bible school for inner-city children. Perhaps you read Response Magazine and share what you learn with your sisters, educating for mission. You give of your time, and your Mission Giving goes to programs near to home and far across the globe, to make the lives of women, children and youth better.

Take a moment to reflect on why United Methodist Women is important to you. And share that story. Who led you to become involved in United Methodist Women? What do you do to make the world a better place for women, children and youth? When and why did you become a member? How has putting Faith, Hope and Love into Action impacted your relationships with others and with God, and how have you grown spiritually?

Our foremothers left us a legacy of mission work, and advocacy, and spiritual growth. Now we are developing our legacy of “personal engagement with God that is deeply entwined with mission service, passionate advocacy and mutual relationships with our sisters around the world.” (Harriett Jane Olson, January 2015 Response Magazine) We are called to follow God’s will for our lives, helping others, growing and learning, advocating and leading. What we do now will leave a legacy for the next generations of United Methodist Women.

In just 4 years, United Methodist Women will celebrate 150 years! As we approach that anniversary, let us do two things. First, share our stories! It will inspire new women to come join the good work that we do as United Methodist Women. And second, give to the Legacy Fund, to provide an endowment to ensure the work of United Methodist Women for another 150 years, so that our daughters and granddaughters, nieces and sisters can continue to put Faith, Hope and Love into Action.

Let us pray: “May we see new visions of what faithfulness in mission now requires of us. Let us focus on a future where Christ leads us to a new creation filled with justice, peace, unity and hope”. (Elaine Magalis)

United Methodist Women Sunday

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

Introit

Call to Worship:

Leader: We give witness to the mission work of United Methodist Women. It is the work to which every follower of Christ is called: to welcome the child, feed the hungry, heal the sick and open the doors to every person as a loved and forgiven child of God.

People: **We are the ones who are called to serve! Thanks be to God!**

Opening Hymn

"Spirit Song"

Pg. 347 UMH

Lighting of the Candles

Congregational Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer & Lord's Prayer

Anthem or Special Music

(note: an all women choir could sign here)

Scripture Lesson

Matthew 18: 1-5, Matthew 25: 32-40

Children's Sermon

Offering of Tithes and Gifts

Doxology

Hymn

"Here I Am, Lord"

Pg. 593 UMH

Unison Prayer

Quicken our hearts again, Lord, to receive your word afresh and anew. May your Spirit's voice be heard, and in the hearing may we respond in service and in witness to your name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sermon

"United Methodist Women – Women with a Purpose"

Hymn

"Pass It On"

Pg. 572 UMH

Dismissal with Blessing

Postlude

United Methodist Women-
Women with a "Purpose"

Now, you might ask – exactly what is the United Methodist Women’s purpose? All organizations – or at least the good ones – have a purpose. The United Methodist Women’s purpose is:

United Methodist Women shall be a community of women whose purpose is to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ, to develop a creative, supportive fellowship; and to expand concepts of mission through participation in the global ministries of the church.

Many of you not familiar with the history of United Methodist Women might ask “exactly how did United Methodist Women get started?” Let me share a little of our early history. The year was 1869, when two wives of missionaries to India, a Mrs. William Butler and Mrs. Edwin Parker, spoke on a rainy night in Boston to a group of six women who were gathered to hear the two women talk of the conditions for women and children in India. You might ask – just what were the conditions in India. In India, no woman could be seen by a male doctor and schooling for girls was almost non-existent. From that meeting came a second meeting. It was not a social gathering. There was no talk of the latest fashions, no chatter about the news from the market – the women were there to take action about what they had heard from the wives of missionaries from India. They were fired up! What a productive meeting – the women nominated officers and dues were set to \$1 a year. They penned their reason for organizing: “For the purpose of engaging and uniting the efforts of the women of the church in sending out and supporting female missionaries, native Christian teachers, and bible women into foreign lands”. Six months later they sent two women missionaries to India – a female doctor and female teacher. In six months the women had raised enough money to support them – they had bake sales, teas, sold eggs, gave sacrificially – they pooled their money together and sent two missionaries to India. Ladies and gentlemen, this is our legacy, our foundation, and the beginning of United Methodist Women, which exemplifies faith, hope and love in action! Love that notices, love that values and respects, and love that is self-giving. This is servant love.

In the 1800’s, women and children were legally classified as “chattel, legally dead, non-persons”. Women were considered the property of their fathers or husbands. There was little service to women because of prejudice and limitations of cultural attitudes in the church and in the society. Women were the majority of those lacking education, health care and proper nutrition as well as access to systems that provide those resources. Women and children also suffer greatly from war and violence. They are also victims of oppression due to cultural or religious customs. Focus on the well-being of women has a great impact on the community. Women are educators and caregivers in most family settings, hence sharing resources, knowledge and tools with the larger community. United Methodist Women strives to fulfill the mandate of Jesus Christ to care and provide for the least of these. And we call on the whole church and society to

share in the call so women, children and youth have a stronger voice in decisions affecting their lives.

Women are still among the majority that lack health care, are illiterate, sometimes abused and malnourished. From the very beginning United Methodist Women were organized to provide education and health care for those needing it.

The parable in our scripture lesson this morning from Matthew 25 is perhaps the greatest sermon ever preached on the theme of compassion for the poor and marginalized. If you see somebody hungry, and you feed them, you've fed me, Jesus says. If you fail to feed them, you've failed to feed me, Jesus says. If you walk past them without helping them, you've walked past me. If you meet a stranger and you welcome them, you've welcomed me. If you care for a sick person, you've cared for me. If you visit someone in prison, you've visited me. So Jesus is saying there were no way we can love him without taking care of and loving the hungry, needy, and imprisoned. United Methodist Women have been advocates for many social issues in our 146 year history. Our foremothers found it that by sticking together they were able to impact the lives of women first in India, and eventually Korea, China, and other parts of Asia, as well as here in the US and eventually every corner of the globe. They challenged child labor, racist policies such as anti-lynching and fighting Jim Crow laws and eradicating poverty. They also saw that some of the same concerns that impacted women overseas were being experienced at home as well. There was the movement of families from farms to the cities, the arrival of immigrants from other countries, and the migration of African-Americans from the Jim Crow south to the industrial cities of the north. They started National Mission Institutions, many of which are called Bethlehem Centers and operate in ethnic minority and disadvantaged neighborhoods on property mainly owned by United Methodist Women. For those who do not know – Bethlehem centers were an early 20th century product of the efforts of southern churchwomen to reach communities of color in the days of segregation. Many of these mission institutes continue in service and relationship with us today. We have one of those centers here in Virginia – the Wesley Community Service Center in Hampton. United Methodist Women took up the issues of women's right to vote, full clergy rights for women, civil rights, public education, public education for all, fair labor practices, racial justice, environmental and economic justice. These issues did not arrive in some neat, prioritized order. We worked on many of them at same time. And the women of this organization did not always agree on how the issues should be addressed. Like the wind, the Spirit can seem to move in many directions at the same time. That's one of the reasons we need each other. Women were not allowed in the pulpits to preach so they proclaimed their dedication to Christ through service and advocacy on behalf of women and children. Some of the skills they were able to master were things like administrative skills, public speaking, advocacy and leadership as well as fund-raising skills.

When we understand that God's character is one of action and faithfulness as exemplified in Jesus, we are also moved to action. Our God is one who speaks and

acts. They are the one and the same. One cannot speak the word of God without action.

“Love on another” is the commandment that tells us to put our love into action. We are transformed when we view the world through the eyes of love for one another. Women all over the world want the same for themselves and their families: a good meal, a good place to rest, security, joy, a life full of peace and love. We are called by God to work so that all families may have these basic needs met.

So what are some of the social issues United Methodist Women are studying about at our Mission Encounters, on our reading lists, and program books? Immigration is one of those issues at the top of our list. It is part of United Methodist Women’s on-going commitment to migrant and civil human rights. There are many sides to immigration – it is a very controversial issue. You or I may or may not always agree with every stand United Methodist Women takes on an issue. The key is education and learning about all the different views. Domestic violence is an issue UMW and UMM are both working jointly on. Gertrude Daily, a newly commissioned deaconess, works with the domestic violence programs at the YWCA in Annapolis, MD. She shares that her youngest client is 16 and the oldest 80. She also reports that immigrant women who experience domestic violence tend to keep it to themselves. Their spouse may threaten to take away their green card or passport or turn them in. These women, and many other who are not immigrants, feel that once in a marriage you stay there, no matter what. Ms. Daily has been helping with educational campaigns in schools and churches to help prevent domestic violence and create safe spaces for survivors. As people of faith, we need to share that the God we serve does not desire anyone to suffer from this type of violence. As United Methodist Women members, we work to be sure there are escape routes in place that will help people who find themselves in this situation. Poverty is another social issue that is the focus of our studies as well as our action. Many programs have been started in our churches such as the backpack program that addresses the issue of children going hungry on weekends when they are not getting free breakfasts and lunches at school like they do during the school week. Human Trafficking is very much a social issue United Methodist Women are learning about and focusing on.

I want to share a story told by a United Methodist Women Regional Missionary in Asia. She tells of a United Methodist Woman in Burma who coordinates a project that teaches young women in the impoverished city of Yangon how to cut hair to help them improve their life circumstances. Anna knows many young women who are in dire need of an income. Women without job skills are more at risk for being tricked into prostitution – a major problem for indigenous women in Burma. She also knows that thousands of young women and girls are trafficked into nearby countries. Many of them are sold into prostitution in China for the sole purpose of bearing a male child. These young women have no knowledge of the Chinese or Burmese because they speak their own tribal language. They are left in a confusing situation in which they are brought to unfamiliar places, not aware that they are being sold. Many of their pimps come from the same

places where they live. When these young women bear a child, especially a boy child, they are thrown away and are separated from their sons. Anna was asked why she started her project, and she said it was to keep young women away from the pangs of violence and death.

Women with a Purpose – Anna put her faith into action with her work with the young women in her area.

There are many stories from United Methodist Women members from all over the world.

United Methodist Women is the largest denominational faith organization for women with approximately 800,000 members whose mission is fostering spiritual growth, developing leaders and advocating for justice. Our members raise up to \$20 million each year for programs and projects related to women, children and youth in the United States and in more than 100 countries around the world.

I love being a United Methodist Woman! I would like to share a mission giving story being told at one of my first circle meetings of United Methodist Women.

A senior lady of the circle and church explained Mission Giving to the newer members of United Methodist Women. She told of a missionary, named Kathryn Eye, who was a medical missionary to Africa. Kathryn was helping deliver a baby for a woman in the village – the mother died in childbirth but the baby lived. There was no one to take the child to raise – everyone was starving in that village. In situations like this it was customary to bury the baby alive with the mother. Kathryn couldn't believe that was going to happen. The very day of the burial was going to take place; money came into the missionaries from United Methodist Women. They were able to take some of that money and buy the baby from the family. Kathryn then raised the child herself. When Kathryn left to come back to the states, her daughter she had raised and saved from death, stayed in Africa to do mission work herself. Ladies and gentlemen, this is why mission giving dollars are so important! We don't have to know where every last nickel and dime goes but we have to have the faith that those making those decisions for us are doing the best they can with God's guidance and prayer, to send the \$20 million or so dollars of mission money raised every year to where it is needed most. That takes faith! That takes purpose! During Jesus' ministry on earth, many women became followers of Jesus. They recognized how Jesus met their own needs for healing and wholeness. They also recognized the needs of those around him and they fulfilled those needs out of their own resources. Today, United Methodist Women members are continuing to do just that. We are extending wholeness and healing and abundance to others who are left out of God's table. We have formed a sisterhood of grace with the work we do and we invite all to join us in this important work!

Please pray with me:

Almighty God, you are the originator of mission. We thank you for your love and grace as we continue your work with the least of these. May we continue to experience you in new and deeper ways and have the courage to act on that faith. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Written by Mary Jane Rawley

United Methodist Women Sunday

Gathering For Worship

Prelude

Greeting One Another

Introit

Call to Worship: Psalm 33:20-21

Leader: We wait in hope for the Lord;

People: He is our help and our shield.

Leader: In Him our hearts rejoice,

People: For we trust in his holy name.

Lighting of the Candles

Opening Hymn

Christ For the World We Sing

UMH 568

Opening Prayer:

O God, our help in ages past and hope for years to come...

We come to you because you are our living hope.

We come in faith because you have been faithful to us.

We come with our hearts full of love because you love us to no end,

We come in hope because you have fulfilled your promises.

May we pass on our faith and your faithfulness to your people.

May we share your tangible love with our sisters and brothers.

And may we be vessels of hope to the world in which you have placed us.

We commit ourselves to you afresh: "May your unfailing love rest upon

us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you." (Psalm 33:22) In Jesus name, Amen. (in part from Praveena Balasundaram, Program Resource Editor United Methodist Women)

Proclamation and Response

Anthem

Sung Prayer for Illumination *What Gift Can We Bring, verse 2* UMH 87

Scripture Lesson *Luke 10: 1-11, 17, NRSV*

Hymn *O Zion, Haste* UMH 573

Sermon *Distinctive Mission*

Prayers of the People

Lord's Prayer UMH 895

Offertory

Doxology

Prayer of Dedication

Lord, you have called us your own and blessed us with much. May these gifts be for others so that they will know we are Christian. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Amen.

Reaffirmation of Faith *Apostles' Creed* UMH 881

Sending Forth

Hymn *Go, Make of All Disciples* UMH 571

Dismissal With Blessing:

United Methodist Women is a community of women whose purpose is to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus

Christ; to develop a creative, supportive fellowship; and to expand concepts of mission through participation in the global ministries of the church. Go and do likewise.

Taking the Light into the World

Benediction

Methodist United Women
Sermon for United Methodist Women Sunday

Distinctive Mission

May the meditations of my heart, O Lord, be acceptable in your sight, my strength and my redeemer, Amen.

“Almost 90 years since a Methodist minister named Hiram Frakes established Henderson Settlement to educate [that region of Appalachia’s] impoverished children, the poverty rate for Bell County, where Henderson is located, is 33.5 percent, [while] the poverty rate for Kentucky is 18.6 percent, according to the [2013] US Census...In a place where the nearest department store could be 20 miles away and a family may or may not have a car,...some of the homes are a distance apart, back in the ‘hollers,’ [making the home visits for outreach workers from Henderson Settlement rather lengthy, but they go because the need is great]...One of the many programs offered by Henderson Settlement, a place where low-income families in three counties of eastern Kentucky and two counties of northeast Tennessee have turned for help since it was founded in 1925...is the Maternal Infant Health Outreach Worker. The target population is pregnant women and families with young children from birth to three years old. Sixty families, including twenty families who receive regular home visits are served by the program. Mothers from the local community are employed as outreach workers. They educate families about nutrition, child health and development,...parenting practices, and provide links to medical and social services. Henderson Settlement has always depended on United Methodist Women,...not only...[for] baby hats, infant car seats”¹ and all things baby, but for their time and donations.

United Methodist Women was also there for Joaquina Nhanala of Mozambique with scholarships to study. “She speaks five native languages as well as Portuguese and English...She studied in three African countries and was an instructor and dean of students at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology in Kenya.”² Today she is the first women bishop in The United Methodist Church in Africa and oversees two conferences in Mozambique and the South Africa Provisional Conference.

“Empty lots and homes in various stages of disrepair dot the landscape of Camden, New Jersey. Poverty is an issue...where 38.6 percent of the city’s 76,903 residents lived below the poverty line from 2008 to 2012, according to the US Census Bureau.

“Helping women, children and families in this community has been the mission of the Neighborhood Center of Camden, a United Methodist Women national mission institution, for 101 years...The center’s programs include day care, after-school activities and summer camps

for children and fellowship for seniors. It also has a community kitchen that offers lunch and after school meals, a food pantry and a flash grocery store providing food for the holidays.”³

We are United Methodist Women. Do you know who you are?

Because this is United Methodist Women Sunday, I’ll ask another question. Who among you have made the choice to be a member of United Methodist Women? Now, I’m going to ask you to stand up so that we can all see who you are. (pause, then applaud) I applaud you for making the choice. I applaud you for remembering who you are and what you are called to do. Please sit down. For those who are not members of United Methodist Women, what do you know about United Methodist Women and what assumptions have you made about those who are?

Those of us who are members hope that you know that we are committed to spiritual growth, that we nurture each other and that throughout our 146 year history (2015), we have reached out to those who are marginalized both in our own communities and around the world. Through our baptism, our spiritual foundation and the understanding that we are Christ’s disciples called to action, we have helped to provide schools, clinics and community centers as part of our ongoing commitment. For you see, from our founding March 23, 1869, when our foremothers organized to stop foot binding in China, we have continued to organize to end injustices wherever we find them. We speak up for women, children and youth. We provide training to help women make better lives for themselves and their children. United Methodist Women brings women together in small groups to grow in faith, to learn about our own potential and how to teach others about their potential. “We stand on a legacy of personal engagement with God...entwined with mission service, passionate advocacy and mutual relationships with our sisters around the world.”⁴

“Like many Liberian women today, Tomrah Topka has gone back to school. Every morning the 25-year old settles into a high school classroom in Monrovia, the African nation’s capital, surrounded by much younger girls, [b]ut she’s not embarrassed.

“‘I moved to the city so I could complete my education,’ she said. ‘We need more ways for people to go back to school, people like me who couldn’t get an education because of the war...If we’re not educated, we won’t be able to educate our children. And if we can’t do that, things will never change in Liberia.’...’

“Every morning, Ms. Topka drops her 3-year-old daughter Maropue off at a preschool in Monrovia run by United Methodist Women. Then she goes to school herself, hoping to soon finish her studies and enroll in the university...to study biology. In the afternoon, she picks up Maropue and heads to the market, where she spends the afternoon selling oranges...

“A couple of hours outside of Monrovia, several dozen poor rural women work together to farm cassava on a six-acre plot near Mount Barclay...Most members of the group are widows, a common status in a country where hundreds of thousands of people died in more than two decades of fighting, but because of the farm project they can now send some of their children to

school. ‘That’s how we’re getting rid of poverty,’ [one of the groups leaders, Ms. Helen] Mensahn said. The farm project, dubbed ‘Say No to Poverty,’ is sponsored by the National Federation of Women Employees and Allied Workers and funded in part by United Methodist Women.”⁵

“How,” you may ask, “do they do that?” The answer is that we are wonderfully organized; after all, we have had 146 (2015) years to figure it out. We have annual materials provided for us; we have training about various missions and leadership training. We have 97 United Methodist Women-supported missions in this country and 179 plus around the world for which we provide support. Deaconesses and home missionaries are funded and organized under our auspices. People depend on us because they know that we care about them. What we provide is often the difference between living and dying.

So, why do women make such a commitment? Why does anybody who gives of themselves in order to help other people, do what they do? The answer lies in our baptism. When we were baptized, we were washed clean, and God’s sacred child was revealed and commanded to go forward in His name. We were commissioned to change the world by making it a better place. What is the root word of commissioned, mission. Mission is what we do. No, it is not just for missionaries; it is not just for ministers. It is for everyone, and it is for United Methodist Women too.

Who are we? In the early verses of The Gospel According to Luke, chapter 10, it says:

...The Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way.

Some ancient authorities read seventy-two, but nevertheless, can anyone name even one third of the seventy...disciples who were sent by Jesus? “They walked with Him, felt His touch, heard Him commission them and send them...Surely these people should have an exalted place in the history of the Christian movement. They must be [very important people, but] we don’t even know their names. All we know is that there were seventy...of them, and Jesus sent them out in pairs to announce the Kingdom of God. That tells us something vitally important: [That tells us that] the mission is for everyone...[But why would they go; why did they say yes?] The seventy...[went], and as a result, people who were stuck, were set free. People who were sick,...were healed. People who were out of control,...were liberated, and [helping in that way] is worth it. There is something about truly giving to others, truly serving them, truly seeing them transformed and changed, that lifts us to heights of joy that personal pleasures can’t even come close to. If you have experienced this, then you know, there is no greater joy than the joy that comes from knowing that God has worked through you to make an eternal difference in the [life] of someone else.”⁶

The danger is that we may forget who we are; we may have spiritual amnesia. I'm going to name some famous people: Oprah, Bill Gates, Mother Teresa, Abraham Lincoln, Jesus Christ. "Each one of these people is famous for something. There is something they do that makes them distinctive from everyone else. There is not another Oprah, Bill Gates, Mother Teresa... They are unique, different and have had or are having a distinct impact on our culture. Webster defines distinct as something or someone who is distinguishable from all others, or having a special quality, style or attractiveness. Distinguishable from all others, [and those I] listed have distinct personalities."

"Let me give you one more...ready: Christian. [There are] a lot of definitions for the word that simply means, like Christ or as the Romans would call them, little Christ...Scripture tells us we are so much more than just a person who does things; ...we are to be distinctive in our nature. Our lifestyles and our actions are to be different from the world...God wants us to recapture our distinctiveness, to remember who we are as God's people, [because] understanding our identity is crucial to fulfilling our destiny."¹⁰

"Nestled in one of the more affluent neighborhoods..., the University of California Los Angeles is one of the top public research institutions in the United States and home to more than 40,000 students. Life [there] is overwhelming for many, fraught with many social issues...Amid the chaos and stress of undergraduate and graduate student life, there is a refuge...a sanctuary: the Wesley Foundation Serving UCLA, [which] creates an environment that is welcoming, warm and supportive. [Supported by United Methodist Women], Deaconess Jeanne Roe Smith is campus minister at Wesley Foundation, living out her call in connecting the university to both the church and the world. In April [of 2015], the Wesley Foundation celebrated (or will celebrate) 87 years of campus ministry. It is the longest full-time continuous campus ministry in the California-Pacific Annual Conference and has a long tradition of progressive thought and action. It held racial dialogues in the 1940s, empowered women in leadership in the 1950s,...and became the first reconciling community outside of a local congregation in the 1970s. The tradition continues today with radical hospitality and ministry with immigrant students. UCLA has a high percentage of immigrant students, including first-generation Americans born of immigrant parents...[Deaconess] Smith offers resources, support and encouragement to these immigrant students in the hope that connecting with Wesley Foundation can help normalize their college experience."⁷

"Moore Community House is a United Methodist Women national mission institution serving low-income women and young children in east Biloxi, Mississippi,...a neighborhood rich in ethnic diversity and cultural history but poor in financial wealth. [It has served since 1924, when] Biloxi was the seafood capitol of the world...by serving children in migrant families who came to work in the seafood factories and lived in the factory-owned camps located in east Biloxi...Today the challenges...are most severe for families headed by single mothers,...a demographic...growing in Mississippi [where] women make up half of...the total work force but [are] about two-thirds of [the] state's minimum wage workers."

Moore Community House provides “programs that best move low-income families closer to economic self-sufficiency” like “affordable, quality child care so the parent can work, [where] the child is prepared for success in school, and job training that leads to higher paying employment like the Women in Construction job training, which “equips women with national certification in commercial construction and operates in partnership with large employers along the Gulf Coast.”⁸

“Tim Lamb fought against all odds. His mother was a single parent living paycheck to paycheck. She had no cash reserves. She worked so many hours that she had little time to be with her children. Mr. Lamb repeated the first grade three times, [but] recently he retired as a colonel in the US Army, with two master’s degrees.

“The interventions that made becoming a senior military officer with multiple degrees possible were provided by Wesley Community Service Center in Portsmouth, VA, [you guessed it,] a United Methodist Women-supported national mission institution.

“Jo Ann March has both received and given many services through the center. Her story reflects the duality within the Wesley community. At times she has received help, and at times she has given help. [At] fifty-nine years old, she grew up in Portsmouth,...the mother of three and the grandmother of nine.

“[Inspired by] a 60-year-old woman who had just completed her GED,...Ms. March went to the Wesley center, and they tutored her. In November 2013, she received her GED. [Then she] enrolled in a physical therapy aide course [and] is taking computer classes.

“Ms. March is a regular volunteer. She has engaged in organizing community dinners. She delivers food through the food pantry and Meals on Wheels. She gives pep talks to the GED classes. She has taught cooking classes, and she helps in the afterschool program.

“Wesley is a community...in which people have lifelong relationships. They give what they can. They receive what they need.”⁹

United Methodist Women “choose to live distinctively, bearing one another’s burdens, serving one another, accepting one another’s differences...and remembering the words of Paul in Colossians 3:17, ‘Whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.’

“Maybe it is time to...remember who you are!...Are you living a life of distinction?”¹⁰

(re 17 minutes)

Nancy D Walsh

¹response, December 2014, Annette Spence, pages 16-19.

²response, March 2014, Richard Lord, pages 22-24.

³response, November 2014, Beryl Goldberg, pages 22-25.

⁴response, January 2015, Harriett Jane Olson, page 5.

⁵response, September 2014, Paul Jeffrey, pages 24-26.

⁶www.sermoncentral.com/print_friendly.asp?SermonID=137576

⁷response, June 2014, Myka Kennedy Stephens, pages 40-41.

⁸response, January 2015, Carol Burnett, pages 17-19.

⁹response, June 2014, Richard Lord, pages 20-22.

¹⁰[www.sermoncentral.com/print_friendly.asp?Sermon ID=149088](http://www.sermoncentral.com/print_friendly.asp?SermonID=149088)