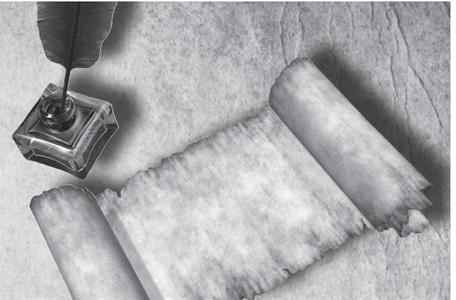


HISTORIAN'S DIGEST



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“Queen Mother” of Civil Rights, Dorothy Height, dies at age 98*



Dorothy Irene Height, a leading voice for human and civil rights and an active member of St. Mark's United Methodist Church in New York City, died on April 20 at Howard University Hospital in Washington, D. C. at age 98. She was born on March 24, 1912 and grew up in Rankin, PA, where her parents were involved in the Baptist church. She recalled during a 2005 United Methodist Communications interview that as a child she was involved in every aspect of the church so that her earliest grounding came in the church.

Height began attending St. Mark's Methodist Church while a college student and this led to her lifelong affiliation with the UMC. Her faith, which she attributed to developing a strong sense of self-reliance, stayed with her throughout her life. “I find through meditation and prayer that there are very few things that I do not find some way to deal with.”

Mary McLeod Bethune, another well-known Methodist laywoman and founder of the United Methodist-related Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona Beach, FL, became her mentor. Bethune also founded the National Council of Negro Women, an umbrella organization of civic, church, educational, labor, community and professional groups. She brought Height into the Council and during the 1960's, she became the President. She helped organize voter registration in both the North and the South as well as scholarship programs for student civil rights workers.

Retired United Methodist Bishop Violet Fisher, 70, said that Height was the “queen mother of the civil rights movement,” who helped to blaze the trail for women like herself. “I celebrate her heart for justice and mercy and her ability to walk humbly with God,” Fisher declared. “Thanks be to God that she opened the doors, especially to African-American women. I am so grateful that she did not leave the Methodist movement.”

Height's passion for racial and gender equality inspired younger women, as well. She helped organize the women's caucus in the National Council of Churches in the 1970's. Mia Adjali, a retired Women's Division staff member remembered meeting Height during an assembly of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women in Ireland. “Her presentation was about women and power,” she recalled. “I had probably never really dealt with that concept, of women actually not being afraid of acquiring power or discovering how important it might be to move women towards an equality with men.”

When Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his historic “I Have a Dream” speech in 1963, Dorothy Height was the only woman, besides Mrs. King, who was invited onto the platform. Forty-six years later when Barack Obama was sworn in as the nation's first African-American president, she was invited onto the platform once again. Height said of that experience, “This is the real recognition that civil rights was not just what Dr. King dreamed. But it took a lot of people a lot of work to make this happen, and they feel part of it.”

Nevertheless public recognition for her contributions to the civil rights movement was late in coming. “As a woman she was often unnamed, but she was always in the photographs when the civil rights leadership visited the White House” said Peggy Billings, who met Height when she was working for the Women's Division of the UMC.

Over the years Height became so known for her stylish hats that a Howard University dramatization of her life was entitled, “If This Hat Could Talk.”

*Taken from an April 20, 2010 UMNS article by Linda Bloom.

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Letter from the President

In his book, *Reminiscences of Early Circuit Life*, James Erwin of the Central New York Conference shared an instance of “sommnambulistic exercises” from sometime in the 1830’s. A timid young man named Gould, resisting a strong call to preach, began to hold services in his sleep.

One night in a sound sleep he gave out a hymn and sung it, offered an earnest prayer, gave out another hymn, waited restlessly for it to be sung, then announced a text and preached a powerful sermon, called seekers to the ‘mourner’s bench’ and prayed for them just as earnestly as if it were a reality. Gave out another meeting one week from that time. In the morning he seemed to have no consciousness of what had occurred in the night (Erwin, 75-76).

The man’s wife gathered witnesses, and before long large congregations were attending the night time preaching.

Since similar accounts appear in other autobiographies of Methodist leaders in that period, one is tempted to wonder if this is something of a preacher’s legend. However, John Lenton records in John Wesley’s *Preachers* that early Methodist preacher Jonathan Catlow was known to have done the same in 1753, an event which Wesley recorded in detail in his *Journal* (Lenton, 78; *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol 20, 460-461). Catlow exhorted the gathering to sing “with the spirit and the understanding,” lined out the hymn, pitched the tune, and sang. He exhorted attention to the Scripture, gave the text, and preached a six part sermon. He disputed with a visiting clergyman, led the doxology, met with the society, gave an exhortation, and after a parting verse greeted each person leaving, all while fast asleep.

In both instances, separated by more than a half century, the preachers used a similar form, a simple combination of singing, prayer, Scripture, preaching, and exhortation. We might call it the original traditional Methodist worship, or, as Lester Ruth reminds us from it’s origin as “work of the people,” early Methodist liturgy.

This Summer our closing worship at the joint meeting in Seattle will feature this format. While the 1840’s marked the beginnings of change toward the more formal worship that would become traditional as the century progressed, the “landmarks of our Zion,” as some Methodists called the old fashioned form, continued to be important, particularly in frontier regions like the Pacific Northwest with little access to the resources for newer styles.

Some years back I remember a Jurisdictional gathering singing in an old frame church in a former town in the copper mining region of Upper Michigan. The town was gone. The Church was maintained by some local folk as a memorial to the days gone by. The building was no longer used. However, as the thirty or so United Methodists gathered around the piano and let loose with an old Wesley hymn, the lathe and plaster of the old building seemed to ring with the echo of all the music of the years.

I am hoping that something similar happens at the closing worship this Summer. Maybe we will hear an echo of what Ruth calls “a little heaven below” as we line the hymns, pray, hear the Scripture, the sermon, and the exhortation in the fashion that Methodists of the 1840’s would have known. We may get a sense of why this form was so important to people like Gould and Catlow.

Who knows what we may then do in our sleep.

Peace.

Dan Swinson

From the General Secretary

Our knowledge of the history of Methodism and related movements should inform current debates for the reform of the church. Russell Richey expressed this very well in his fine collection of essays, *Methodist Connectionalism: Historical Perspectives*, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 2009. "More needful than...hindsight is a compelling vision for the future. In that the memory of our wandering Arminian fathers and mothers should figure. Memory, including the memory of our own tradition, constitutes an important source of Methodism's self-understanding, a point reinforced in the *Discipline's* theological guidelines, and its own appeal to history. We do need to be reminded of our forebears' visions and their perplexities. That can be a stimulus for today's ministry--but it will not suffice. History can inform but cannot provide the vision." (page 82)

There many discussions occurring in the church around its global nature, the place of general agencies, and the form and effectiveness of ministry. Each can benefit from a historical perspective not trying to repeat the past but to draw on it to inform. I have found the conversation around "guaranteed appointment" for elders in full connection to be troubling. There seems to be voices being raised to "eliminate the guaranteed appointment" and that will enable bishops to remove ineffective pastors. Does our history have anything to teach us? I would suggest that it does.

In 1989 Robert Kohler, then staff for the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, presented a paper to the Commission for the Study of Ministry in which he pointed out that on this topic "one finds a very short legislative history and a very long oral tradition." He referred to *The Minister in the Itinerant System* by Bishop Thomas B. Neely, published in 1914. Bishop Neely wrote that the systems promises "that the preacher shall be provided with a pastoral charge...(and)...that, if he does faithful and successful work, he need not be concerned about his next appointment, for the appointing power will concern itself about that." (page 46) The 1912 *Discipline* spelled out how conference membership could be terminated and these include judicial procedures (par. 243-260). The 1956 *Discipline* was clear that, "Every traveling preacher, unless retired, supernumerary, on sabbatical leave, or under arrest of character, must receive an appointment." (par. 432.9) The 2008 *Discipline* states, "All elders in full connection who are in good standing in annual conference shall be continued under appointment by the bishop unless..." (par. 337). The language of Bishop Neely in 1914 is most interesting, "Back of the system, therefore, is the whole Church, self-obligated--sworn, so to speak, to conform to and to uphold this system of pastoral assignment. It is a contract between the laity and the ministry." (page 50) In other words, the bishop sends, the clergy go without reserve, and the laity receives. Break any link and the itinerancy is in jeopardy.

Charles Brockwell, in an unpublished paper in 2008, wrote, "This is accountable security of appointment for persons in good standing, not guaranteed appointment of those in protected categories." There have been and still are procedures for changing the conference relationships of clergy. There are procedures for exiting clergy. I don't believe that the decision on appointability should taken away from the clergy session of the conference and given to the bishop and cabinet. I am not defending protecting ineffective clergy but to draw on our history to inform our discussion. The covenant between bishop, clergy, and laity is at stake. Slogans that are not grounded in our history and our polity will not provide the vision for a renewed church, vital in outreach and invigorated in service.

Bob Williams



Note from the Editor

It is our hope that Bob William's article will generate some dialogue from our members. Do you agree with Bob, disagree with him, or have some other comments that you'd like to make? We would welcome letters to the editor regarding Bob's column. Remember, the deadline for the next issue is August 1.

HAVE YOU REGISTERED FOR THE ANNUAL MEETING IN SEATTLE JULY 19-22, 2010?

The registration deadline in June 15. Please see the enclosed registration form for details for what will be a very exciting and interesting meeting. Hope to see you in Seattle in July!!

It's a 21st Century Problem – Can an Electronic Production be Considered a “Publication?”

The Texas United Methodist Historical Society held its 35th annual meeting at Lubbock First United Methodist Church March 25-26. The Society is sponsored by the eight annual conferences with appointments in Texas. Each year the organization presents Kate Warnick Awards to the best local church histories produced by congregations in the eight participating annual conferences. Dr. William J. Bryan III of Perkins chairs the awards committee. This year the Warnick Awards went to Chapel Hill UMC of Farmer's Branch, a medium sized church, and Christ UMC of Plano, a large church. The compromise solution to the question of electronic publication was to allow such works, but with the provision that three hard copies be submitted as well.

Some forty persons were in attendance. The meeting's theme was an observance of the 100th anniversary of the separation of the old Northwest Texas Conference into two parts, the older half taking the name Central Texas Conference and the conference records; the newer half kept the name Northwest Texas. Both conferences planned to produce books celebrating their 100 years of existence. The Northwest Texas volume, written by Dr. David Murrah, is entitled *And Are We Yet Alive?* and appeared last year. It is a nominee for the HSUMC's Saddlebag Selection. Murrah, former professor at Texas Tech and former head of Tech's distinguished "Southwest Collection," was the featured speaker at the event. The Central Texas Conference's forthcoming volume is being produced by a committee of writers, two of whom, Michael Patison and Carol Roszell, also addressed the meeting.

A fourth speaker was Betty J. Brownsted, winner of the TUMHS's prize for a student essay on an aspect of Texas Methodist history. Her paper, "The Influence of Methodism in the Spiritual Formation of Texas Preacher, Physician and Pioneer, The Rev. Thomas Hunt Hall, M.D. (1839-1914)" was nominated by Perkins professor Ted Campbell.

At the business session, the TUMHS elected officers for the next biennium. They are William C. Hardt of Brenham, president; Robert W. Sledge of Abilene, vice president; Daniel Flores of Fort Worth, secretary; and Jean H. Traster of Arlington, treasurer. The Society unveiled the sixth volume of its annual *Heritage Journal*, the thickest edition thus far and the first to receive "perfect binding." The 2011 meeting will be held in Brenham, focusing on the theme of "Robert Alexander and His World." Alexander was one of the three first Methodist missionaries sent to the Republic of Texas in 1837, and by far the longest-lived of the three.

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