On a blustery fall day in 1932, a small tornado named Mary Decherd blew into the office of Dr. L. U. Spellman, pastor of University Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in Austin, Texas. Spellman had come to University Church in 1930 and had immediately begun to experience the problems of a depression-era church. There was not enough money for the congregation to function the way it had in the past. That was his chief worry.

But another of his concerns that day was what to do with one of his parishioners. Miss Mary Decherd, a longtime member of UMECS and a mathematics professor at the adjacent campus of the University of Texas, was driving him to distraction with her meddling in things that did not concern her. Miss Decherd, Spellman said later, “had a great love for the church, devoted much of her time to its welfare, and was frequently at odds with the official board, the pastor, or any other who, in her opinion, was laggard in duty.” She was a woman of enormous energy and drive, but that energy had been pent up and frustrated since the collapse of her pet project, the Texas-Brazil Committee, two years earlier.

The preacher’s concerns about Miss Mary were soon dispelled, however, since she introduced a new idea that might help the congregation’s financial issues. No one else seemed to be interested in tackling a church debt that had grown to over $23,000, so she had devised a plan which she now presented to her pastor. As she unfolded her idea, Spellman became intrigued by its possibilities. If he could persuade the board to try it, and it worked, he could solve the problem of the church debt and get Miss Mary out of his hair at the same time.

While Spellman thought her plan was excellent, he had some trouble convincing his board, whose members were “very reluctant to turn Miss Mary loose on the congregation.” Receiving “grudging consent,” Spellman gave Miss Decherd the green light. It all worked out very well: by January, she had raised nearly $2,500. With this impetus, the church was able to pay off its indebtedness within a couple of years.
Mary Decherd was born in Bastrop, Texas in 1874. The family moved to Austin in 1885. Her devout mother, Kate Decherd, developed a strong interest in missions. She was active in the local chapters of the Woman’s Home Missions and Parsonage Society, and the Women’s Foreign Missions Society. Additionally, she was “Lady Manager” of the girls’ missionary group sponsored by the congregation. This Juvenile Missionary Society was organized in 1888. Kate’s daughter Mary was a charter member and an active participant in these meetings. The lessons she learned there were to bear important fruit later. The congregation organized an Epworth League chapter in 1892, one of the very first in the state. From the Epworth League, Mary Decherd imbibed still greater missions consciousness, plus an awareness of the power latent in a youth group.4

Young Mary was a brilliant student with an independent spirit. Since her father was often away from home on business (he was a middle level official with the Texas State Treasurer’s office), she was raised mostly by her mother and grandmother. Once, when her father demanded that she do something, she protested to her mother, “Do I have to take orders from him?”5 Graduating from high school at the age of 15, the precocious Mary entered the University of Texas. She completed her bachelor’s degree in three years, graduating in 1892 and going on to become the first female to earn an M.A. degree from the University. She also did graduate work at the University of Chicago.

After ten years of teaching at Austin High School, Miss Mary began work at the University as a mathematics instructor. As a professor, she continued her interest in religious matters. In 1931, she was instrumental in inaugurating the University’s Committee on Student Religious Life. For several decades, she taught a young woman’s Sunday school class that usually numbered around a hundred.6

The significant work for which Mary Decherd will be most remembered began just before World War I when she launched a one-woman crusade to support Methodist missions in South Brazil. The first successful Methodist missionaries to Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil’s southernmost province, were Methodist Episcopal preachers moving north from neighboring Uruguay. The ME missionaries were versed in the Spanish language of Uruguay, but uncomfortable in Brazil’s Portuguese language. When the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, expanded its Brazil mission into Rio Grande do Sul in the 1890s, the ME leaders turned their Brazilian work over

4 Robert W. Sledge, “Five Dollars and Myself:” The History of Mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1845-1939 (New York: General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church, 2005), 296-299.
5 Mary Katherine Decherd Dolhof, interview by author, Austin, Texas, December 12, 1993. 
6 Austin American Statesman, December 12, 1948.
to the southerners. Soon an informal agreement between the two denominations divided the South American field into Portuguese-language missions for the ME Church, South, and Spanish-language missions for the ME Church. This effectively gave Brazil to the southern Methodists and the rest of South America to their northern counterparts.7

In 1914, the three Brazil annual conferences numbered just under 9,000 adherents, but that was before the field came to Miss Mary’s attention. This occurred when one of her former students was assigned by the Southern Methodist Board of Missions to Rio Grande do Sul.

II

Jerome Walter Daniel was one of eleven children born to a family living in Cotulla, on the broad cattle ranges of southern Texas. He arrived at the state university in the fall 1907 and was soon drawn into the life of University Methodist Church. When the prominent northern Methodist layman Dr. John R. Mott8 spoke in Austin in 1908, Daniel attended the meeting, was converted, and felt a call to preach. Upon graduation in 1911, he entered the seminary of the ME Church, South, at Vanderbilt University. By March, 1912, he felt an amplification of his call, an urge to offer himself for the foreign mission field. His motive, he said, was “to help those who know not Christ to find him, that they may become better and happier.” Although he studied Greek, Hebrew, Spanish, and German during his university and seminary careers, he confessed that he did not have “a great facility in the study of languages.” Applying to the Mission Board, he asked, if accepted, to be sent to Africa or Brazil. Among his references he listed two of his former pastors at University Methodist Church, Cullom Booth and D. Emory Hawk, and a former professor, Miss Mary Decherd.9

The mission board’s foreign secretary, Edmund F. Cook, dispatched a form letter to Miss Decherd in January, 1914, inquiring about Daniel’s character and suitability for mission work. She responded immediately, describing Daniel in glowing terms: “I feel so delighted that Mr. Daniel wants to be a missionary. He is just the material you need. . . . He seemed to me to be an unusually strong sweet-spirited man.” She added that he was of exemplary character, sound in judgment, firm, considerate, calm, poised, and able to adapt to almost any situation.10

7 Sledge, 226.
8 Mott was a pioneer in Christian ecumenism who received the 1946 Nobel Peace Prize.
9 Application to Board of Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Archives of the United Methodist Church, Drew University, Madison, NJ, 1271-5-3:56. Hereafter UM Archives.
10 Edmund Cook to Mary Decherd, January 14, 1914 and Mary Decherd to Edmund Cook on the same sheet of paper, January 17, 1914. Underlining in the original. UM Archives 1271-5-3:56.
Daniel passed his medical examination in March, 1914. The physician noted that he was of “spare” build, just under six feet tall, and weighed 142 pounds. His family history indicated that he came from good stock. One grandmother was listed as having died when she was “very old, above 50.”

On the strength of the recommendations, an interview, and the medical examination, the Board accepted Daniel’s application. Three days after his physical, Cook notified him that he had been appointed as a teacher at Union College in Uruguayana, province of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.

After completion of his work at Vanderbilt later that spring, Daniel went home to raise funds to underwrite his mission. Dropping by Austin on his way to Cotulla, he mentioned his needs to some friends in the student body and the faculty. They responded that he need go no further. “Why, we’ll send you ourselves.” Initiatives also later came from the Board of Missions asking that $750 be raised for Daniel’s salary for the first year. There happened to be 750 Methodist students enrolled at the university and they pledged the whole amount in one dedication service.

Daniel arrived in Brazil in time for the meeting of the South Brazil Annual Conference, was admitted on trial, and was formally appointed to Uruguayana. The following year, he received appointment as pastor in Passo Fundo, a town in the Uruguayana District.

Passo Fundo was a rather remote community of about 8,000 people located in the middle of Rio Grande do Sul state. Its agricultural and cattle orientation reminded a visitor of the plains of south Texas, so Daniel felt right at home. The population was almost entirely of European extraction, including recent immigrants pouring into Brazil from Italy, paralleling the wave of immigration into the United States at the same time.

Daniel remained in Passo Fundo from 1915 through 1921, and it was here that he did his most intriguing work. At the 1916 annual conference, he was admitted into full connection and elected to deacon’s orders, but not ordained because no bishop was present. A senior missionary presided over the conference that year, as Daniel himself would do a few years later. It was not until 1918 when newly-elected Bishop John M. Moore arrived in Brazil that the ordination could be accomplished, and by that time, the conference had also elected Daniel to elder’s orders too, so he was ordained twice at the same conference sitting. In recognition of Daniel’s accomplishments at Passo Fundo, the conference met there in 1921. At that session, Bishop Moore appointed him to the nearby Cruz Alta District as presbytero presidencial (presiding elder) and to pastor at Cruz Alta.

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11 Medical report, UM Archives 1271-5-3:56.
12 Cook to Daniel, March 19, 1914, UM Archives 1271-5-3:56.
13 Typescript “What We Find in Passo Fundo” in Mary Decherd Papers, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin. Hereafter UT Archives.
14 General Minutes of the M.E. Church, South, 1915, 26-27.
15 Missionary Voice, 1923, 8.
16 General Minutes, 1916, 25-26; 1917, 325; 1919, 54; 1920; 57.
17 General Minutes, 1921, 54-55.
What had happened at Passo Fundo during Daniel’s stewardship? Membership in the local church had grown from under 100 members to over 140, to be sure, but the big event was the establishment of the Passo Fundo Institute.

The new pastor had not been at his post for long when he became aware of the total absence of educational advantages in Passo Fundo; even the most rudimentary schooling seemed to be lacking. Setting out to meet this need, Daniel applied to the mission board for funds to buy lots on which to erect a mission school. The first problem confronting the enterprise was that land in Passo Fundo could not be simply purchased, but could only be leased. If an existing building were demolished to make way for a school—as would have to be done given the dearth of suitable sites in the city—the new building would have to be completed within a year, or the whole property, including improvements, would escheat to the city. The money for the building had to be in hand or they could lose the whole investment.18

Admitting that he was acting on faith, mission board head W. W. Pinson gathered enough preliminary funds by early 1917 that he was able to send a cablegram to Daniel, saying “Break dirt,” when a suitable site could be found. Pinson also notified Mary Decherd, asking her to keep working on funding.19 Miss Decherd and her students came fully to the rescue, expanding their pledge of $750 a year (though they had already exceeded this sum in helping with Daniel’s travel expenses) and raising an additional $5,475 in support of the proposed school. They rallied other Texas colleges to pledge their support. At this juncture, the Passo Fundo town fathers, now convinced that Daniel was in earnest and recognizing their community’s need for a school, proved that the faith of Pinson, Daniel, and the University Church Epworth League was well founded. They donated two full blocks of land in the western part of the city, a tract heretofore known as “Praca do Boa Vista” (Park of the Beautiful View). Construction began at once and “Texas Hall” was ready to receive students in December, 1919. The school opened its doors as “Passo Fundo Institute” in March, 1920.20

Texas Hall was a large two-story building made of dressed stone. The pediment of the Greek façade included a replica of the seal of the University of Texas. The school song was set to the tune of “The Eyes of Texas.” Two years after Daniel left, the institute erected a second major edifice called “Daniel Hall,” financed through funds raised by Mary Decherd and her Epworth League. Daniel Hall was a brick, two-story structure nearly as big as Texas Hall. The campus also included fields for “foot-ball, basket-ball, tennis, and other games.”21

18 Missionary Voice, 1928, 8.
19 W.W. Pinson to Mary Decherd, February 1, 1917, Mary Decherd Papers, UT Archives.
20 James L. Kennedy, Cincocenta Anos do Methodismo no Brasil (São Paolo: Imprensa Methodistia, 1928), 382.
21 Kennedy, 386.
As the school developed, it began teaching higher level classes until, by 1925, it was renamed "Instituto Gymnasial do Passo Fundo" with students enrolled in two years of primary work, five years of elementary work, and four years of either secondary work or commercial studies. It was intended that graduates of the secondary curriculum would be fully prepared to sit for college entrance exams. Needless to say, the whole institution was the pride of the students in Austin.

The Instituto Gymnasial became a magnet for other missionaries, many of them new recruits from the University of Texas. Prominent among the enhanced staff was a Californian who was already in Brazil. Maggie Lee Kenney was a pastor's daughter from Los Angeles who had wanted to be a missionary since she was ten.22 The missions board sent her to American College in Porto Alegre, the principal city of Rio Grande do Sul, in 1912. She met Daniel soon after his arrival in Brazil, love bloomed, and they were married on New Year's Day, 1917.23 From that point on, her assignment became Passo Fundo where her husband was pastor and director of the new school then developing.

When the Daniels were assigned to the Cruz Alta District in 1921, D. L. Betts of South Carolina became director of the Institute, with a teaching staff now augmented by Eula Harper of the University of Texas24 and J. Earl Moreland of Southern Methodist University. In 1922, the missions board dispatched two other of Miss Mary's Leaguers, Rev. Raymond A. Taylor and his bride Audrey, to Passo Fundo. Another UT graduate, Charles H. Marshall, joined the staff in 1923. In 1926, UT alumna Zula Terry came to the Instituto Gymnasial.

Some University of Texas graduates who went to Brazil were not posted to Passo Fundo. Mary Sue Brown of Waco and Rachel Jarrett of Texarkana went to Brazil in the 1920s and stayed until after World War II. Brown, trained as an architect, designed several buildings for Brazilian educational institutions, but experienced trouble getting Brazilian contractors to work for a woman. She was head of one of the mission schools for many years. Maud Mathis (class of 1923) also represented the University of Texas Epworth League as missionary to Brazil for many years.

The Daniels remained in Brazil until 1934. While he was very successful—serving as pastor of the largest churches; presiding elder of two districts; treasurer of the mission; and once, as the conference's presiding officer—Brazil was not entirely happy for the Daniels. One son died while they in the field, and Maggie Daniel nearly died of a miscarriage in California on the way back after a furlough in 1929. But Daniel led the way for many of his fellow students to follow him to lives of service in Brazil.

22 Application to the Women's Board of Foreign Missions, January 12, 1912, UM Archives 1271-5-3:56.
Coincidently, with Daniel’s plans for the new school in Passo Fundo, his denomination entered into a cooperative venture with the Methodist Episcopal Church to commemorate the founding of the Missionary Society in 1820. This anniversary celebration was called “the Centenary.”

The support given to Daniel and Passo Fundo by the University Church Epworth League came to the attention of the Centenary directors and prompted them to hire a special “educational secretary” to promote this sort of thing all over the denomination. Even before the University of Texas campaign had reached full throttle, the new secretary, C.G. Hounshell, wrote:

A remarkable missionary movement is going on at the University of Texas in connection with University Methodist Church. The students have appointed a Passo Fundo Committee for the purpose of raising money to build a church in Passo Fundo, Brazil where Rev. J.W. Daniel is our missionary. Being an alumnus of the University of Texas and having a great many friends at the University, he has been supported by the students. Now that he has been appointed to a city that has no church building, his friends are rallying to his support and are raising money to build a church. Many Methodist students in the colleges and universities of Texas have been enlisted in the enterprise and are contributing to it. . . . The sum of $3,000 has already been sent in, and work on the new church has begun. $1,000 more will be needed to complete the work. This splendid example might well be followed by students in other States. Miss Mary E. Deckherd [sic], a member of the faculty of the University of Texas and a member of University Church, is a leader in this movement and has had remarkable success in creating interest and organizing students for missionary work. Perhaps this is the beginning of a great missionary movement among students. Should they as a class become thoroughly aroused to their opportunities in evangelizing the world, no one can estimate what they might accomplish.25

At first, Miss Decherd marshaled her students at the University Church Epworth League to work among themselves. She soon expanded her horizons to include the entire state, recruiting other schools to add their weight to the Passo Fundo project. After 1918, however, the Austin group undertook the Passo Fundo project alone and asked the others to take up other missionary tasks. To cover this expanded burden, Miss Mary organized letter writing campaigns, by means of which her students blanketed the state, especially University of Texas alumni, with letters requesting financial aid for the project. The results were astounding. After the 1914 and 1915 donations of $750 each, the students raised $2,200 in 1918-1919, $3,300 in 1919-1920, $6,200 in 1920-1921, and continued at that level throughout the decade. The 1928-1929 giving reached $6,700.

In 1917, the state-wide alliance of colleges gave a total of over $4,000 for the erection of a church building. The state group also accepted responsibility in 1918, after a challenge from the Board of Missions, to raise an

additional $5,000 for the maintenance of People’s Central Institute in Rio de Janeiro. In support of this effort, Hounshell made a swing through Texas to promote support for Brazil. He had great response at initial stops at the Southern Methodist University, and the University of Texas. Before he was through, the missions executive visited San Antonio College, Texas Woman’s College, Southwestern University, and seven or eight others. A central committee of Texas students and leaders under Bishop E. D. Mouzon as chairman and Miss Mary Decherd as secretary was formed.26

The goal was raised yet again in February, 1920, when Bishop John M. Moore (the presiding bishop of the Brazil annual conferences), Hounshell, and a furloughed missionary from South Brazil named Rev. C. L. Smith met with the central committee and representatives from eleven Texas colleges. Could they raise $50,000 for Passo Fundo? When the answer came, “we can,” Smith made personal visits to twenty schools to organize a Brazil Committee in each. In the fall 1920, Hounshell visited twenty-five colleges in Texas in the interest of the Brazil work. On February 5, 1921, seventy-five delegates from thirteen of the schools met in Denton to hear J. W. Daniel speak. “It is impossible to express in words,” Miss Decherd wrote, “just how much it meant to those of us who have looked after the ‘home base’ of the work to hear from the lips of our foreign representatives of the great things that have been accomplished and the overwhelming magnitude of the present opportunities.”27

In 1922, the Board of Missions employed a Chinese Methodist, Peter S. T. Shih, to promote missions among the students of the ME Church, South. He spent seven weeks making the rounds of the twenty-five colleges in Texas, involving a total of seven thousand miles of travel and over a hundred speeches. This, he said, was a model for other states: “This work that our students are doing is significant. For Texas is the only State, as a State, where the Methodist students are undertaking such an important missionary project. It does not imply that our students in other States are not doing anything at all, but this statement does intend to suggest to the students in other States that they get busy and assign themselves some definite piece of work which can be carried on to its completion.”28

Much of this organizational activity came in the wake of the Centenary movement. By 1922, the Centenary excitement was subsiding across the church, but not at the University of Texas. The students there continued their interest unabated. Under the spell, and sometimes the whip, of Mary Decherd, they forged an enduring organization to continue support of the Brazil mission. They held fund raising drives at all seasons of the year, but especially in the springtime. Not only did the students canvass the University community, they wrote letters by the hundreds to solicit funds.

26 Missionary Voice, 1918, 121-22.
27 Missionary Voice, 1921, 140.
28 Missionary Voice, 1923, 8.
Notices of their activities filled the University Methodist Church bulletins. “Miss Decherd’s Sunday School class gave a splendid feed and program at the Wesley Bible Chair. A letter-writing bee will be conducted at the Bible Chair next Tuesday night at seven o’clock.”29 “The Texas-Brazil groups will hold another letter-writing bee Thursday night from 7 o’clock to 8 o’clock. Miss Decherd reports that answers are already coming in from the letters sent out last week.”30 “Letter-writing bee held by Texas-Brazil Committee in preparation for the annual spring drive. 60 people wrote letters to 170 exes, with the Woman’s Missionary Society of the University Church providing supper.”31 “Texas-Brazil Committee meets Monday. After the program, letters to foreign students will be written.”32

Miss Mary dragooned whatever human resources were at hand to assist in the paperwork and bookkeeping such a large undertaking generated. Students in her university classes, students in her Sunday school class, her young nieces, and anyone else who happened within her reach were pressed into service for an hour or two of work.33 In 1927, there were over 200 students actively involved, with 914 donors on the rolls.34

The Texas-Brazil Committee and Miss Decherd kept the project always before the students. In October, 1927, for example, they began a “make-believe” cruise to Brazil. “Preliminaries are over. The Texas-Brazil Committee is leaving for South America tomorrow night. Come and see what we see, hear what we hear on the way. All you need for baggage is a receptive mind.”35 “King Neptune and his court are due to arrive and suitable initiation service will be held.”36 “Two weeks aboard ship and no one seasick yet. Come sail into the harbor of Rio de Janeiro with the Texas-Brazil Committee.”37 “The Texas-Brazil Committee will continue its trip through Southern Brazil this week. Porto Alegre and other places in Rio Grande do Sul will be visited tomorrow night from 7 to 8 o’clock in the Bible Chair.”38 In hopes of introducing freshmen to the work, they pretended to conduct President-elect Hoover and his wife on a 1928 tour of South America and the mission stations there.39

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26 University M.E. Church, South, Weekly Bulletin (also called The University Methodist), February 27, 1927, UUMC Archives.
31 UMECS Weekly Bulletin, March 22, 1929, UUMC Archives.
33 UMECS Weekly Bulletin, November 13, 1927, UUMC Archives.
35 Missionary Voice, 1927, 299.
37 UMECS Weekly Bulletin, October 16, 1927, UUMC Archives.
The remarkable aspect of the whole enterprise was the way it was sustained over a decade-and-a-half. Successive generations of student leaders passed the interest and enthusiasm on to the next generations without interruption. That this happened was due to Mary Decherd, the single continuous element in the project. She rewarded herself, and gathered ammunition for further promotion of the Brazil project, by traveling at her own expense in 1923 to visit the mission field she was supporting. When one of the missionaries encouraged her to “come down and see how much good the students’ money was doing,” she accepted the invitation. She wrote an article summarizing her adventure for Missionary Voice, the monthly magazine of the Board of Missions. In the article, she lifted up the hospitality of the Brazilians, the heroism of the missionaries, and the extent of the need for educational and evangelistic operations throughout the country. Was the effort she was expending on their behalf worth it? For Mary Decherd, the answer was an unequivocal affirmative.

Three events conspired to bring the Texas-Brazil connection to an end. One was the onset of the great depression, which was already present in the rural areas of the southwest by 1927. It eventually forced a major missionary retrenchment.

The church informed D. L. Betts, a colleague of Daniel’s in Brazil, that if he took a furlough he could not go back to Brazil unless he could “get necessary funds from [his] friends, without asking credit on apportionments.” One could waive, not postpone, a furlough, and still might be recalled anyway. “You have no idea how desperate our financial situation is at this time and it grows worse every day,” the board told Betts. Jerome Daniel was reluctant to leave Brazil, but told the board “it might be easier for me than for some others.” They called him home in 1934.

A second blow was the establishment of an autonomous Methodist church in Brazil. The 1930 General Conference granted autonomy to the Mexico, Korea, and Brazil missions. While the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, continued to fund missionary work in Brazil and elsewhere, the connecting link was strained—if not quite broken—by this act.

When news of the General Conference action reached Brazil, there was widespread disappointment, and not just among the missionaries. “If we rightly interpret the legislation of the General Conference,” Daniel wrote, “the new church will be entirely in the hands of the Nationals. They are disappointed with this arrangement .... The General Conference gave more than

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was asked or wanted .... Just now, there is some suspicion that the Mother Church just wants to get rid of [us].”43 To Mary Decherd, Daniel was even more direct. “May the Lord help us,” he said. “It is too early for it. But, on the other hand, it could not be postponed. Absentee bishops have forced us to it ten or twenty years sooner than it should have come.”44

The General Conference saw things differently than Daniel. An observer from the Missionary Voice called the day of the vote “the greatest day that had come in the history of our Church.”45 The three new churches would retain “some form of organic connection with the home church, as could be agreed upon and formulated.”46 The General Conference named a commission headed by Bishop Edwin D. Mouzon to establish the autonomous church in Brazil. On August 30, 1930, the delegation met with the three Brazil annual conferences and formally transferred the work into Brazilian hands.47 Many of the missionaries stayed on and some lived out their lives there.

These two events were compounded by the most serious problem of all - the withdrawal of support by University Methodist Church. In 1928, pastor H. Bascom Watts48 became convinced that the Texas-Brazil mission was a drain both on the congregation and on the student work in general. Together with George Baker, the associate pastor assigned to the Bible Chair work, he yanked the rug out from under Miss Mary and her team. This came in the form of a reorganization plan approved by the Board of Stewards in February, 1929. All Methodist student work in and around the University of Texas would now be placed under Baker as head of the new entity called the Wesley Foundation. The Texas-Brazil Committee would continue to promote missionary endeavors, but with a much reduced budget. “We believe,” the pastors stated, “that the larger good of the work both here and in Brazil justifies more concentrated emphasis, in a financial way, on our work with students here. We believe that some retrenchment on this item at present, coupled with an intensification of our activities on the campus, will give us a more solid base for larger missionary endeavor in the future.” The proposed budget to accompany the plan reduced missions giving to $2,500.49

It appears that the ministers believed that, in the case of the Texas-Brazil Committee, the tail was wagging the dog, and that too much time, energy, and money was being diverted into that cause at the expense of the broader student work agenda. They were concerned that Miss Decherd was not as accountable to the church, the pastor, or anyone else as she should have been. In modern terms, they saw her as a “loose cannon.” Whatever their

42 J.W. Daniel to Mary Decherd, June 4, 1930, Mary Decherd Collection, UT Archives.
43 Missionary Voice, 1930, 292.
44 Missionary Voice, 1930, 292.
45 Missionary Voice, 1930, 542 ff.
46 Elected Bishop in 1956.
47 Quarterly Conference Minute Book, April 1, 1929, UUMC Archives.
motivations may have been, the result was clear enough. Miss Decherd’s Brazil project was going to be radically downsized at the home base.

The program struggled on for a few more years and then was dropped. Miss Mary loyally turned her efforts to the support of the local church (under a new pastor) and to the establishment of a campus-wide interdenominational program called “Religious Emphasis Week,” which continued the mission interest. The speaker for 1936 was the great Japanese Christian leader, Toyohiko Kagawa, and for 1942, the most famous of contemporary Methodist missionaries, E. Stanley Jones.50

After World War II, poor health forced Mary Decherd into retirement. At her home near the campus, she raised flowers, studied history, and maintained a steady correspondence with friends. “I am 74 years old,” she said in 1948, “but my sister-in-law says I expect to be about 16. Somebody asked me if I didn’t get lonesome. How could I when I’ve got a whole fraternity right across the street from me?”51 In 1954, the mainspring finally ran down and Mary Decherd at last got a well-deserved rest. But the work in Passo Fundo endured into the 21st century.

50 Mary Decherd to Roy L. Smith, March 4, 1946, Mary Decherd Collection, UT Archives.
51 Austin American Statesman, December 12, 1948