“TOWARD THE LIGHT”:
METHODIST EPISCOPAL DEACONESS WORK AMONG IMMIGRANT POPULATIONS,
1885-1910

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“But, I do believe the world is swinging toward the light.”
— Lucy Rider Meyer

Methodist Episcopal (ME) deaconesses contribute to an understanding of the theme of new creation within the late 19th-century American Wesleyan tradition in at least two ways. First, ME deaconesses embodied John Wesley’s doctrine of sanctification as women were consecrated to lives of service to the physical and spiritual needs of the urban poor. ME deaconess literature portrays their depth of vocation. They were not only converted to the cause of the deaconess movement, but also transformed as servants of the gospel, demonstrating evidence of sanctification in their own lives. Like Wesley, ME deaconesses in the Chicago area, led by Lucy Rider Meyer, maintained emphases related to the realization of the kingdom of God through evangelization that was influenced by late 19th-century theological trends. The specific language of new creation, particularly used eschatologically by Wesley, is not evident in material related to the ME deaconess movement under Meyer’s leadership. However, ME deaconesses contributed to the reshaping of the theme within the 19th-century Wesleyan heritage through their embodiment of the Wesleyan doctrinal emphasis on sanctification and their perspectives on the kingdom of God. Second, deaconesses reshaped the concept of new creation through a ministry of breaking down socio-economic barriers. They ministered to a variety of disenfranchised constituencies such as the infirm, orphaned, aged, and destitute. The latter part of this essay focuses on the deaconesses’ work with immigrant communities in the Chicago area demonstrating their contribution to a late 19th-century American Wesleyan understanding of new creation.

1 This material was originally presented in a different form at the Eleventh Oxford Institute, Christ Church, Oxford University, to the Nineteenth-Century Studies Group on August 16, 2002.
2 See John Wesley, “New Creation,” sermon written in 1785.
The office of deaconess has precedent in the ministry and writing of John Wesley who followed a long, but scattered line of western European clergy interested in women’s diaconal ministries. Wesley was criticized for his endorsement of the deaconess role. In 18th-century England many perceived the deaconess as an antiquated model of ministry, although with apostolic and patristic roots, which resembled a form of “papism.” As a result of these prejudices the role of deaconess was often suspect within evangelical Protestantism. Lucy Rider Meyer and her spouse Josiah Shelley Meyer initiated the ME deaconess movement with their establishment of The Chicago Training School in 1885. The ME General Conference officially recognized the role of deaconess in 1888. However, the movement confronted similar suspicions.3

While in Georgia, Wesley experimented with several religious practices modeled on the primitive church, all of which would develop into defining attributes of the Methodist movement in later years. He experimented with the use of hymns, lay leaders, extemporaneous prayer, and preaching as well as the appointment of deaconesses or visitors to the sick.4 Scholars such as Ted Campbell, Paul Chilcote, and Frank Baker refer to Wesley’s probable employment of women in the role of deaconess while he was in Georgia, however, they claim that Wesley refrained from using the term deaconess to refer to such work.5 Wesley included practices and offices of the early church, such as the deaconess in his early evangelistic plan, though he avoided the direct use of such a title. The list of indictments against Wesley immediately preceding his hasty departure from Georgia included his organization of women in ministry roles that resulted in, “all persons of any consideration [coming] to look upon him as Roman Catholic.”6 The indictments explicitly named the charge related to women’s roles established by Wesley, “appointing Deaconesses, with sundry other innovations which he called Apostolic Constitutions.”7

3 See Charles F. Bradley, “Woman and City Missionary Work,” The Message, (July 1887), 1; “First Deaconess Convention,” The Message, (October 1889), 7; Editorial, The Message and Deaconess Advocate, (October 1900), 8. Although the denominational response to the deaconess movement included anxiety related to similarities between the ME deaconesses and Roman Catholic sisters, admiration was also expressed for the work of the Roman Catholic sisters particularly as nurses. See Bishop Hurst, “On Woman’s work in the Church,” The Message, (March 1888), 1; “Women in the Churches,” The Message, (September and October 1888) 1; “Roman Catholic Charities,” Deaconess Advocate, (August 1903), 8.
6 Patrick Tailfer, True and Historical Narrative of the Colony of Georgia, (Charleston: n.p., 1741), quoted in Chilcote, John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism, 40, note 103.
7 Chilcote, 40.
In spite of Wesley's experience in Georgia, he encouraged the role of visitor to the sick among women within the British Methodist movement. In a letter to Vincent Perronet in December 1748, Wesley detailed the role of the visitor as a part of his, "Plain Account of the People Called Methodists." Wesley's development of visitors was modeled on the ministry of Phoebe mentioned by Paul in Romans 16.1, whose office Wesley described as a deaconess in his *Notes on the New Testament*. In his sermon, "On Visiting the Sick," delivered initially on May 23, 1786, Wesley stated that the work of women among the sick was well known in the primitive church, "They were then termed 'deaconesses,' that is, 'servants'—servants of the church and of its great Master." Similar to Wesley, Lucy Rider Meyer explored foundations to legitimate the role of deaconess through biblical exegesis and the historical study of significant primary sources within Christian tradition in her text, *Deaconesses, Biblical, Early Church, European and American.*

II

The ME deaconess movement embodied Wesleyan doctrinal emphases, such as sanctification through the significance placed upon vocation within the movement. Her Sunday school teacher led Lucy Rider to faith in Christ as a child. As a young woman, she taught freedmen in a Quaker school located in Greensboro, NC. According to her biographer, Isabelle Horton, Rider was motivated by a missionary spirit to engage in such an endeavor. "The deep tragedy of a people so circumstanced made its appeal to a heart already sensitized, and strengthened the impulse to consecrate her life to service." According to Horton, Rider was attracted by the high standard of consecration, but, "may have seen... a tendency to divorce religion from the higher learning or to restrict the search for new truths. ... Whatever the inner reason, she was not able to commit herself unreservedly to this cult." Horton's predisposition to subjectivity, including her clear endorsement of a modernist agenda, qualifies her description of Rider. Horton later claimed that, "Miss Rider defended her Methodist faith," in a reference to Rider's acceptance of Arminianism, which as scholars have demonstrated was often consistent with the holiness movement.

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5Isabelle Horton, *High Adventure: Life of Lucy Rider Meyer*, (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1928), 35. Josiah Shelley Meyer is most likely the primary source for Horton's description of Rider's spiritual journey, "Mrs. Meyer told me one Sunday afternoon how her faithful Sunday school teacher led her to Christ, when she was but a small child; and how, later, she went with her mother to the mid-week prayer meeting, and got up and gave her testimony. How happy she was that evening! Later, she experienced the gift of the Holy Spirit, which brought her the conviction that she must do something for others, and she went to North Carolina to teach in a Negro school, in a hostile community, under the Friends' society." See J. S. Meyer, "Modern Miracles," (unpublished memoirs, n.d.) 43.
6Horton, 44-45.
Similar to Lucy Rider Meyer, ME deaconesses also possessed strong vocations to their ministry. In the initial consecration service, in 1888 in Chicago at which Bishop Thomas Bowman presided, deaconess candidates were described as having received forgiveness for sins and the witness of the Holy Spirit. Wesley referred to the forgiveness of sins as an essential aspect of the Christian life, specifically with regard to assurance of faith and salvation as a component of justification. The training school provided a venue for the practical preparation of deaconesses through the acquisition of skills, but also for the cultivation of the deaconess candidates' inner life. Such spiritual cultivation through the process of sanctification contributed to their ministry. "Christ is so to live in you and me that we are to be his representatives. In our gentleness and humility of spirit the world shall see Jesus. In the character of our daily life there must be the very spirit and temper of Christ." This experience of sanctification shaped the vocation of ME deaconesses to the full-time service of Jesus Christ and humanity.

The duties of the ME Deaconess are described in the consecration service: "You are to minister to the poor, visit the sick, pray with the dying, care for the orphan, seek the wandering, comfort the so no wing, save the sinning, and relinquishing wholly all other pursuits, devote yourselves to such forms of Christian labor as may be suited to your abilities." The forms of Christian ministry articulated in these duties represent works of mercy, a component of the process of sanctification outlined by John Wesley as a means of grace. Such works of mercy pursued by the deaconesses under the leadership of Meyer were not isolated from works of piety such as corporate worship, communal support, accountability, and private exercises such as prayer, Bible study, and devotional reading. Through their practice of works of mercy as a response to their vocation, which was initiated and sustained by prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace, these women served as bearers of the Wesleyan tradition and its theme of new creation in the context of late 19th- and early 20th-century Chicago.

13See Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 124-127. However, according to Wesley, justification was distinct from justifying grace.
14Miss Gregg, "Value of Training for Christian Workers," *The Message and Deaconess Advocate*, (June 1894), 12. "To work here we need those whose education is liberal, whose knowledge is broad, whose minds are cultivated, and above all whose hearts are full of the love and humility and sympathy of the Christ." The article concludes with the assertion of the need for the baptism of the Holy Spirit after the example of Christ. "Our training schools are modeled after this one nineteen hundred years ago [the life of Christ and calling of the disciples], the study of divine truth, trial mission work, the kindly criticism, the suggesting of plans and places of labor and the development of the inner life."
15"What are you going to be?" *Deaconess Advocate*, (October 1906), 9.
16See Mary Agnes Dougherty, *My Calling to Fulfill*, (New York: Women's Division, General Board of Global Ministries, 1997), chapter 1 for additional discussion of deaconesses' vocation within the United Methodist tradition.
17L. R. Meyer, *Deaconesses, Biblical, Early Church, European and American*, 232. The duties of the ME deaconess are also specified in the Discipline beginning in 1888.
18Maddox, 215.
The deaconesses led by Lucy Rider Meyer also embodied the Wesleyan tradition through their perception and role in the realization of the kingdom of God that resonates with the theme of new creation. According to Maddox, although Wesley's views have been interpreted to include the premillennial and amillennial, an argument for Wesley's emerging postmillennialism, particularly within his more mature work, is viable. 19 Wesley understood the kingdom of God as a growing active presence and current reality through the work of the Holy Spirit in believers and the community of faith. Lucy Rider Meyer, Josiah Shelley Meyer, and the deaconess movement often expressed a similar understanding, although it is difficult to substantiate evidence for specifically articulated millennial themes.

The periodical of the deaconess movement, edited by Lucy Rider Meyer, printed the following, most likely written by Meyer, shortly after the recognition of deaconesses as an official order within the Methodist Episcopal Church: "Thy kingdom come is our daily prayer, but do our actions indicate an earnest desire for its coming? Are we helping to bring the nearing of the kingdom?" 20 Shelley Meyer described their work after his wife's death as an, "aid in establishing His Kingdom on Earth," and offered a petition for God's guidance "never [to fail] to find consecrated souls for His service until the last and least of earth's 'little ones' shall feel the touch of Divine help and healing." 21 The kingdom of God was in one instance defined "in every day language" as "nothing but the consummation of neighborliness." This benign summary was prudently expanded upon.

Jesus, accepted as the Saviour from sin, as the Interpreter of life, forces his followers to put to themselves the decisive question—Do you believe, truly and with your whole heart, in the reign of God on earth?...Is it more than a bare conception which, from time to time, visits your brain? Is it a passion possessing your heart? Is it a mighty conviction gripping and guiding your will? If it is not all that, it is at best a halting, a crippled Christianity. 22

The church's role in the realization of the kingdom of God on earth pervades the literature of the deaconess movement. Within this rhetoric a background is provided upon which may be sketched their contribution to a 19th-century Wesleyan understanding of the theme new creation.

The Chicago Training School propagated the Methodist deaconess movement which eventually consisted of additional institutions such as training schools, Deaconess Homes, and other institutions for ministry to the disenfranchised such as hospitals, industrial schools, and homes for the orphaned and elderly. Lucy Rider Meyer crafted the curriculum of the Chicago Training School with the pursuit of the kingdom of God as its aim:

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19 Maddox, 236-247.
20 The Message, (June 1888), 2.
22 Henry Sylvester Nash, Deaconess Advocate, (September 1908), 10.
So as she [Meyer] marked out the policy for the infant institution she had in mind not only a comprehensive study of the Bible but studies in hygiene, in citizenship, in social and family relations, in everything that could help or hinder in the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.\textsuperscript{23}

The first Deaconess Home emerged from the summer use of the training school facilities in 1887, which would otherwise have remained vacant. The nascent Deaconess Home was described as a “life germ” that shall grow waiting for the “showers of heaven” in the hope that the facility “may be used for the advance of the kingdom.”\textsuperscript{24} The deaconesses pursued their ministry with fervent desire for the evangelization of the masses and even the world as a component of the realization of the kingdom of God on earth. “The evangelization of the world within the lifetime of the middle-aged man living today is within easy reach of our effort. It is not within easy reach of our indifference.”\textsuperscript{25} This desire was expressed at times with an element of admonition, “[God] is pouring out His spirit on the people for this very thing and while it is glorious to live in this latter part of the nineteenth-century, it will be fearful if we ignore our duty.”\textsuperscript{26} A front-page article entitled \textit{The Call of the Hour}, reiterated the hope, “By every sign and signal God has shown the men of this generation that his purpose is the immediate evangelization of the world.”\textsuperscript{27} A later editorial proposed a methodology for accomplishing the evangelization of the masses:

\begin{quote}
How to reach the masses! Estimating that at each visit of a deaconess five persons heard about Jesus and almost throwing in our Sunday school and hospital work, we reached five millions of the masses last year alone. We healed their sick bodies. We fed and clothed their hungry and naked children, and above all, we told them of Jesus, and we led many of them to Him.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

This excerpt made bold assumptions about the deaconesses’ constituency as well as their responsiveness to invitations to faith in Jesus Christ. In spite of its boldness, the statement assumed the growing presence of the kingdom of God on earth through the Holy Spirit in which the deaconesses participated through their evangelistic ministries.

A thread of optimism pervaded the deaconesses’ participation in the kingdom of God which was woven into the movement’s literature. “How can anyone believe the world is growing worse, looking back to the great movements that the last century has inaugurated?” The article named ten with the deaconess movement as number nine and social reform as number ten. Social reform referred to, “the entire change that has been wrought in prison

\begin{footnotes}
\item[23]Horton, 117.
\item[24]“Our Deaconess Home,” \textit{The Message}, (June 1887), 3.
\item[25]\textit{The Message}, (August 1887), 2.
\item[26]\textit{The Message}, (September 1887), 2.
\item[27]\textit{The Message}, (April 1888), 1.
\item[28]Editorial, \textit{The Message and Deaconess Advocate}, (September 1902), 8.
\end{footnotes}
management, in temperance work and in the feeling among Christians of responsibility for the lapsed masses of our great cities.”

An additional article focused on the related theme of betterment, “Are You Becoming Better?” although reminiscent of philosophical as well as theological trends of the time, “The high philosophy which gets its light from God, believes that life, as it moves deeper and deeper into God, must move from richness into richness always.”

Lucy Rider Meyer and the deaconess movement were formed by eschatological emphases that assumed societal conditions would improve as the kingdom of God on earth increased through the work of the Holy Spirit which included the participation of Christian ministers of service. Later in the 19th century, postmillennial themes represented a distinctive evangelicalism as differences in eschatology led to increased tension among theological perspectives. For example, other Christian leaders embraced premillennial themes that became related to platforms often affiliated with fundamentalism. Lucy Rider Meyer and the deaconess movement seemed to remain rooted in Wesleyan emphases often reminiscent of postmillennial themes in the midst of the early stages of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy.

III

Evidence of a polemic emerged in the middle of the 19th century marked by the publication of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*. The ascension of liberal theology, biblical criticism, and evolutionary theory shaped the modernist movement. The modernist platform emphasized the historicity and humanity of Jesus encouraging social reform for the alleviation of human suffering and systemic injustices. Social reform came to fruition through legislation, at times to the exclusion of individual spiritual formation. In response to this trend of humanism, the five points of fundamentalism were composed in Niagara at a gathering in 1895 of theologically conservative Protestants. The five fundamentals included: inerrancy of scripture, the divinity of Jesus Christ, the virgin birth, the substitutionary theory of atonement, and the physical and bodily return of Christ. The term fundamentalism derived from the series of tracts entitled *The Fundamentals* published between 1910 and 1915. Although both fundamentalists and modernists emphasized scripturally-grounded values, tensions persisted into the 20th century culminating in the fundamentalist-modernist split. The excessive emphasis of opposing components resulted in the physical division of several Protestant denominations along theological and ideological lines into fundamentalist and modernist parties, particularly Baptist, Presbyterian,
and Disciples of Christ. However, as Jean Miller Schmidt argues, other groups such as churchwomen and African American reformers maintained the dialectic of soul winning and social holiness through the social gospel movement into the 20th century. Lucy Rider Meyer, Josiah Shelley Meyer, and the ME deaconesses represent one such group.

Literature related to the deaconess movement demonstrates interaction with supporters of both parties. Mary Agnes Dougherty argues that the Meyers reflect the broader fundamentalist-modernist debate, Shelley sympathizing with fundamentalism, Lucy with modernism. "In the case of the Meyers, liberal and conservative lived under the same roof. They worked together in the same place, ostensibly pursuing a shared goal. For them, the fundamentalist-modernist dialogue could not help but grow personal." William E. Blackstone, a major financial supporter of the deaconess movement, participated in the Niagara Movement including writing a popular tract. Blackstone and Lucy Rider Meyer exchanged correspondence, sometimes tense, regarding his disapproval of her endorsement of biblical criticism, which was taught, often by her, at the Chicago Training School. Horton described in detail Meyer’s modernism, interest in social theory, and influences such as Borden Parker Bowne’s Personalism. However, she also claimed that Meyer resembled Dwight L. Moody, “in her ability to find a spiritual truth in the simplest experiences of life.” Based on a broader reading of Lucy Rider Meyer’s leadership in the deaconess movement, her position seems more complex than simply modernist. Meyer integrated the strengths of both platforms maintaining a balanced evangelistic ministry that addressed the spiritual as well as the physical needs of the disenfranchised.

According to Dougherty, in his memoirs Mr. Meyer attributed the decline of the Chicago Training School after 1910 to the acceleration of modern views with regard to biblical interpretation, “At one time it looked as if the modern views of the ‘intellectuals’ would work a change in the School,” but “...the work of the School had to continue on the early foundation.” In support of Dougherty’s portrayal of Josiah Meyer, Horton described him as a conservative and a literalist. However, like Lucy Rider Meyer, Mr. Meyer’s

33Horton, 184-186.
34Horton, 204-6. Horton gives less attention to her mention of Meyer taking courses at the University of Chicago with Shailer Mathews and Gerald Birney Smith. According to Horton, “But college courses formed a minor part of her education” (203-204).
35Horton, 207.
38Horton, 314, 322.
platform was more nuanced. He argued in a paragraph preceding the above statement:

Paul said in his writings that ‘knowledge puffeth up’. The time had arrived when the conceit of ‘modern’ scholarship, attributed to the ‘better intellect’, set its authority above the inspiration of the Word. Such teaching necessarily led to false conclusions in the minds of some of the students. Modernism is the old Unitarian wims of doubt. The Fundamentalists are the fighting cocks in the pulpit, they are both wrong.99

He also claimed, “Between the critic and the fanatic is often a very narrow and difficult path, but it can be found and maintained by the alert, praying Christian.”40 This narrow and difficult path seems more likely to constitute the early foundations of the school, than a conservative literalism related to fundamentalism. Lucy Rider and Josiah Shelley Meyer, each in their own characteristic manner, maintained the dialectic between personal evangelical spirituality and participation in the growing presence of the kingdom of God through works of mercy shaped by social consciousness.

IV

The ME deaconesses provided numerous services to the disenfranchised including immigrant populations in the Chicago area. Immigrants in Chicago originated from many places around the world such as Arabia, Bohemia, China, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, and Russia. Immigrants were often captive to the systemic poverty within treacherously overpopulated urban neighborhoods throughout Chicago. Deaconesses offered ministries of compassion to immigrants through visiting, nursing, employment counseling, resource groups for mothers, English language training, and social reform advocacy, as well as industrial schools and Sunday schools for children. At times subtexts of fear and prejudice, even among the deaconesses, contributed to negative stereotypes projected upon immigrant groups and the manipulation of evangelization into Americanization. For the most part, however, the deaconesses’ ministries dismantled barriers of class, race, and gender reshaping the Wesleyan theme of new creation within the theological context of the time.

ME deaconesses were described as, “Simply women who are set apart for the whole lay work of the Church.”41 The following statement expressed the all-embracing character of the deaconesses work giving perspective to the plight of immigrants in the late 19th century.

Do not stop to ask where they are to find their work. There are reformatories and poor houses, and orphanages, and there should be Methodist orphanages all over the land; there are prisons and hospitals, and ought to be Methodist hospitals in every

11"What are Deaconesses?" The Message, (June 1888), 1.
Methodist deaconesses confronted the struggles of immigrants regularly in their ministry. "We visited twenty-one families today, and met with Germans, Bohemians, Jews and Canadians, many of them backslidden Christians." Several articles in the deaconess movement's periodical described the statistical enormity of the arrival of immigrants to the United States, and Chicago specifically. Meyer reported in September 1890, "In Chicago, this last decade, 300,000 foreigners have come to us besides the 204,000 we had before." In 1903 a "high-water mark" was expected for total immigration to the United States with the likelihood of 900,000 new inhabitants. "There are seventeen states of this Union, nineteen states of the German Empire, and six American rep [sic], each of which has fewer people than that all told." These articles demonstrate the growing anxiety in response to immigration trends.

The deaconesses cared for both the physical and spiritual well being of immigrant families. Josiah Shelley Meyer told of an immigrant family whose wife had fallen very ill and whose husband could not work or take care of her. A neighboring church reported the need and a deaconess went to the family, sending the husband to work and nursing the wife eventually back to health after putting their dilapidated house in order, and providing food and other supplies. After one week the wife's health improved. Before the deaconess departed, the man asked who she was and why had she done this. She assured him that he owed her nothing and tried to explain her "ideals of Christian service." To which he replied, "Well, long ago I read in a book about some apostles. You make me think of them." As she was leaving he called after her and asked if she attended a church. She said she did and told him where. When she arrived at the church the next Sunday morning the man was there in the vestibule, waiting for her. The deaconess, while providing for the physical needs of the suffering she encountered, also offered an evangelistic witness of love and compassion for the spiritual well-being of persons.

Deaconesses understood the significance of learning the immigrant's language. The Chicago Training School curriculum for the second year referred to the importance of language training, "Candidates preparing for work among foreign-speaking people at home or abroad, are recommended to

42"What are Deaconesses?", 1.
43L. R. Meyer, Deaconesses, Biblical, Early Church, European, American, 111. Meyer's text, Deaconess Stories, includes numerous accounts of M.E. Deaconesses ministering to immigrant families. See Lucy Rider Meyer, Deaconess Stories, (Chicago: Hope Publishing Co., 1900), 63f, 70f, 71f, 83f, 91f, 155f.
45"High Tide of Immigration," Deaconess Advocate, (July 1903), 5.
47L. R. Meyer, Deaconesses, Biblical, Early Church, European, American, 78.
make preparation in the language, etc., of those among whom they expect to labour." Bishop John Fletcher Hurst endorsed language preparation among deaconesses in an address published in the movement’s periodical. “To win the immigrant to Christ we need to speak to him in his own language. He should be able, as soon as he lands, to find a church in whatever tongue is native to him.” A clergyman addressing the deaconess movement reiterated Bishop Hurst’s earlier argument while connecting the imperative to the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God demands such haste that we absolutely need deaconesses who also can speak the foreign languages among this class of Americans. Speaking in a general way, it takes a German mind to fully understand a German’s ways of thinking: a German heart to feel a German’s needs; and a genuine German sympathy to awaken to its fullest measure the German’s affections and confidence; and at last, it takes a German understanding and tact to most successfully win the German with his mind, heart, sympathy, and all. The same holds true of every other foreign speaking American on American soil.

The clergyman added, “Methodism is today preaching the gospel in fifteen different languages.” In 1909, deaconess Emogene Morse, a graduate of the Chicago Training School, ministered among the Polish community of South Chicago.

She boards in a Polish family and is diligently studying the language, while doing what she can to interest the people in the English-speaking church, under whose direction she works. The Polish people, however, do not find here anything that is of their element, and of the children, even, only a few attend the Sunday School. What is needed is a meeting place for the Poles themselves, with services in their own language.

Through their language training, deaconesses contributed to a denominational effort to minister to the growing immigrant population across the country.

Deaconesses also provided language training in English to immigrants through night schools held at local missions. These schools provided needed assistance to adults and youth. However, in the context of such English-language programs prejudices formed by fear occasionally surfaced. One response to the influx of immigrants to the United States was the necessity of Americanizing these vast numbers of persons.

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49 Blume, 4.
This decided change in the nationality of would-be Americans will beyond a doubt, exert the greatest influence on the character of the American people as a whole. Deaconesses, city missionaries, teachers in public schools—in fact, all who are engaged in the great work of Americanizing this miscellaneous assortment of humanity, are pondering the question: How long before our capacity for receiving and assimilating these untrained peoples will be taxed to the utmost?53

At times Americanization and evangelization perceptibly merged most likely as a result of heightened anxiety occasionally evident in deaconess movement’s literature, “How shall we Americanize them? How shall we Christianize them?”54 The aim of the deaconess with regard to immigrants “is to civilize them and convert them.”55 Preventive measures were suggested as a response to the high rate of immigration and perceived need for Americanization. Two tasks were named in one article, “These are the examination of immigrants to ascertain whether they are capable of becoming Americans, and the proper distribution of those admitted. It is not enough to keep out the diseased and the pauperized; it is essential to keep out the vicious and the degenerate.”56 Isabelle Horton narrated the response to immigration of one Methodist minister referring to a Chicago downtown church, “O, we can’t do anything here, except sell the church. Why the district is filling up with foreigners and the American people are all moving out.”57 Horton challenged the denomination to address the needs of immigrants, otherwise she argued, “there will be little demand [for the church] by the middle of the century.”58 However, even Horton seems at times to respond to the crisis she perceived out of fear when she also argued, “We must civilize them or they will heathenize us.”59

Americanization at its best sought to transform whole persons, albeit through the assimilation of the great masses of immigrant populations. “The newcomer finds in America a prevalent atmosphere of freedom altogether different from his accustomed autocratic, restricted environment.... He cannot escape contact with American social and political life.”60 The night schools also served as venues for speeches and political discussions educating the interested immigrant in the American political system. From this perspective Americanization embodied some of the ideals, such as freedom and democracy, hoped for by the newly arrived citizen. “The exercise of the right

59 Horton, “The Crisis in the Cities,” 9. Horton concludes the essay with a plea for support of ministries with immigrant children, “there is growing up amongst them a generation who are not foreigners, but American citizens.”
60 Americanizing the Alien,” Deaconess Advocate, (May 1908), 3.
of suffrage helps along his Americanization." The article referenced does not attempt to gloss over the underside of these ideals. "True, he must meet the pernicious influences of the party boss, fraudulent naturalization papers, and venality at the polls, but above these rise the stimulating and Americanizing influence[s]."

As the ME deaconess movement rooted in Chicago matured, fear in response to issues related to immigrant populations seemed to subside and advocacy increased. The development of social theory influenced deaconesses’ responses by acknowledging systemic issues. The deaconesses’ perception of immigrants held in tension their undesirability and victimization, and eventually shifted toward the latter. "It requires no vivid imagination to understand how not only our own country suffers, but the poor, ignorant peasants are more frequently victimized by these consciousless money seeking creatures [European transport agencies]." The article advocated greater awareness of immigrants’ victimization with allusions to missional themes. "We are a nation with a mission. God has given us great light and it behooves us to hold the torch high to all the world." Deaconesses were eager to acknowledge and work for better conditions on behalf of immigrant populations. "In the deaconess order, properly directed and inspired, the church has an arm of power that can help it to reach the masses, and to solve their problems, in so far as they can be solved in one generation."

Methodist deaconesses advocated the dismantling of social barriers reshaping a Wesleyan theme of new creation within American Methodism. For example, they argued for social reforms to benefit female immigrants. Nearly twice the number of immigrants, than American-born women were employed in the early 20th century. Because of the significant number of employed immigrant women, mostly as domestic workers, deaconesses advocated social reform to increase awareness and improve the standards and conditions related to their work. They also raised awareness with regard to the dismal conditions of tenement housing faced mostly by immigrant families. Property owners, captive to their greed, exploited many urban poor at the risk of the tenants’ health. Poorly enforced city ordinances allowed for excessive overcrowding with large families occupying one or two rooms often without adequate sunlight, ventilation, or plumbing. Deaconesses argued that such inhospitable domiciles provided, "a breeding place for disease and crime." They urged support for socio-economic justice on behalf of the under classes through periodical articles, domestic vis-

64 "Americanizing the Alien," 3.
65 "Americanizing the Alien," 3.
69 "Better Days for the Immigrant," Deaconess Advocate, (December 1907), 2; Deaconess Advocate, (May 1908), 4.
71 "Women Immigrants," Deaconess Advocate, (October 1907), 5.
72 "The Unwholesome Tenement," The Message and Deaconess Advocate, (September 1902), 7.
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Deaconesses also worked for reconciliation among the numerous cultural and racial groups. According to Horton:

As much finesse, as much social tact and diplomacy, are needed to bring Mrs. Morony, and Mrs. Skubinsky, and Mrs. Olson, and Mrs. Essenmacher together in the social club, and to affiliate them with the plain Browns and Robinsons, as to steer clear of breakers in a court drawing room.\(^7\)

Various articles appear throughout the periodical acknowledging the strengths of a particular immigrant group for the purpose of reducing social tensions and building community.\(^7\)

Horton based the deaconesses' strengths in such work in gendered dynamics shaped by nineteenth-century understandings of womanhood. However, in spite of the implied constraints portrayed in the ministry of the deaconess, she embodied a significant Christian witness that valued the reconciliation and justice among people of difference.

Methodist Episcopal deaconesses maintained Wesleyan emphases inherent to an understanding of new creation, such as the importance of the doctrine of sanctification, in their evangelistic ministry with the disenfranchised in late 19\(^{th}\)– and early 20\(^{th}\)– century Chicago. They embodied the dialectic of evangelical and social themes as the fundamentalist-modernist controversy gathered momentum. Deaconesses, although at times influenced by prejudices shaped by fear, worked to break down barriers of class, race, and gender, through their services as teachers, nurses, and advocates of social reform. They reshaped a Wesleyan understanding of new creation through their work with immigrant communities, demonstrating compassion for the physical and spiritual well being of persons. Although not without shortcomings, the deaconesses' ministries may offer a helpful resource informing the church's response to similar theological and social dynamics in the contemporary context.

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\(^7\) "As much finesse, as much social tact and diplomacy, are needed to bring Mrs. Morony, and Mrs. Skubinsky, and Mrs. Olson, and Mrs. Essenmacher together in the social club, and to affiliate them with the plain Browns and Robinsons, as to steer clear of breakers in a court drawing room." Deaconess Advocate, (February 1906), 8.

\(^7\) "Italians Not Undesirable Citizens," Deaconess Advocate, (May 1906), 6.