

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD FROM THE KITCHEN? THE STORY OF WOMEN WORKING TOGETHER IN BRITISH METHODISM

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The story of women working together in British Methodism is one which is under-researched and under-documented. The *T & T Clark Companion to Methodism* acknowledges the indispensable role women have occupied within Methodism right from its earliest period, but despite recent advancements made in the research and celebration of women's stories, it recognizes that much more work is needed to put women into their rightful place in the historiography of Methodism.¹

Women have always been proactive in the Methodist story; it is widely agreed that Susanna Wesley (1669-1742) was a major influence on the faith and social responsibility of her family. Three hundred years after Susanna, women make up approximately 69% of the membership of the Methodist Church in Britain and are active in every aspect of church life.² No role is closed to women, although up to now we have only had four female presidents of Conference,³ so there is still distance to travel on the road to full equality.

As part of this journey, amongst every generation of women in Methodism there have been those who want to meet together to find new ways of discovering God and of serving the community. From women's meetings in local churches, through regional and national residential events, to international assemblies as part of the worldwide Methodist family, women have always "done things together" as well as individually.

Methodist Women in Britain (MWiB), the current women's movement in British Methodism, have initiated the project "Transforming the World from the Kitchen? The Story of Women Working Together in British Methodism." The reason for this project is to create a new archive, "The Methodist Women Collection," to be housed at Epworth Old Rectory, which will then be used to tell the story of women's movements in British Methodism, augmented by the stories of the ordinary women in the pews, working together for the betterment of self, Church, and community, to the wider historiography of the Methodist Church in Britain.

¹ Charles Yrigoyen Jr., ed., *T&T Clark Companion to Methodism* (London & New York: T&T Clark International, 2014), 506.

² The Methodist Church, *Methodist Statistics: Demographics report* (2011), accessed November 25, 2015. <http://methodist.org.uk/media/1168509/stats-demographicsreport2011.pdf>.

³ The Methodist Church, *Minutes of the Annual Conference and Directory, 2015*, (London: Methodist Publishing), 152-153.



Image depicting Susanna Wesley (1669-1742) preaching at the Epworth Rectory. From Elmer T. Clark's *An Album of Methodist History* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1953), 24.

Susanna Wesley is widely agreed to be the “Mother of Methodism,” with her ideas on education and her kitchen meetings seen as precursors to the Methodist Class meeting. As Mary Greetham writes, it was “. . . his down-to-earth, eminently sensible mother” to whom John Wesley turned for advice—as have subsequent generations of Methodists.⁴ So it is in Susanna’s kitchen at The Old Rectory, where the story of women working together in British Methodism will be told and where the project found its name: “Transforming the World from the Kitchen.”

Where did the story of women working together in British Methodism begin? Cyril J. Davey provides his readers with a timeline detailing the dates at which women’s missionary associations began within the various strands of Methodism, beginning in 1858 with The Wesleyan Women’s Auxiliary (originally convened under a different name), with the other branches following suit somewhat later during the 1890s and early 1900s.⁵ Yet, he goes on to say:

These dates, however, give a completely false impression if they are taken at their face value. They are not, in fact, the years when women’s missionary work was actually begun, but they are the times when the Home Church awakened to the fact that the women’s missionary work which had been going on, somewhat haphazardly for many years could no longer be left unorganized and unsupported by the authorities of the Church.

Findlay and Holdsworth agree, arguing that: “Woman’s work in aid of the Methodist Missions did not commence with the starting of the Women’s Auxiliary in 1858; it is as old as the Missions themselves.”⁶ Long before an

⁴ Mary Greetham, *Susanna Wesley Mother of Methodism* (Peterborough: Foundery, 2003), 15 and 16.

⁵ Cyril J. Davey, *The March of Methodism: The Story of Methodist Missionary Work Overseas* (London: Epworth, 1951), 131.

⁶ G. G. Findlay and W. W. Holdsworth, *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Vol. IV* (London: Epworth, 1922), 17.

official women's missionary movement existed in British Methodism, women had been playing an indispensable part in missionary service. Though vocations within the church were few for women during the early nineteenth century, they still played their part alongside men. Women at this time were very much transforming the world from the kitchen; the accepted role of women was for them to be in their separate sphere of domesticity, child rearing, and religious education. It was a commonly held view that even a missionary wife's sphere of influence to help in the cause for Christ consisted of the "exhibition of a Christian domestic life, shedding the light of a pure, gentle and beneficent womanhood amid the loathsomeness of heathen society."⁷ At home in Britain, the women of Methodism took it upon themselves to raise funds for mission, and they were very resourceful in their efforts. As well as the more traditional fund-raising techniques such as forming working meetings, holding bazaars, and carrying out door-to-door appeals, some women even obtained hawkers' licenses, enabling them to sell products door-to-door to raise funds.⁸

The Ladies' Committee for the Amelioration of the Condition of Women in Heathen Countries, Female Education etc. was formed in 1858 and underwent several name changes during its history, the most commonly known one being Women's Work. In 1837, a non-denominational society, "The Ladies Society for Promoting Female Education in China and the East," had been formed to aid the task of steering women to help in missionary areas abroad. Mary Twiddy, a Methodist minister's daughter, was the first Wesleyan Methodist woman to be sent into the mission field by this society. In time, after she became Mrs. Batchelor by marrying a missionary in India, she required help in running her girls' school. It occurred to her that the establishment of a similar society may be of benefit to the Wesleyan Methodist Mission.⁹ Writing to Miss Farmer, the daughter of the Secretary of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Association, to appeal for help, her pleas were answered, and the first meeting of the new society took place on December 20, 1858. The meeting was attended by influential ladies drawn from the London Circuits.¹⁰

Rosemary Seton comments that the society was an agency sending out teachers in response to calls for help from various places on the Wesleyan Methodist mission field.¹¹ This was reflected in the aims of the society. The Manual of the proceedings of the Ladies' Auxiliary Missionary Committee from 1859 to 1880 states the committee's aims as: "To establish or assist Female Schools; and, for this purpose, to train and send out suitable persons as Teachers. To form Associations of ladies at home, and maintain

⁷ Findlay and Holdsworth, 16.

⁸ Findlay and Holdsworth, 17-18.

⁹ Findlay and Holdsworth, 20.

¹⁰ Findlay and Holdsworth, 20.

¹¹ Rosemary Seton, *Western Daughters in Eastern Lands: British Missionary Women in Asia* (Oxford: Praeger, 2013), 96.

correspondence with agents abroad.”¹² This sending of women missionaries overseas to raise the standards of women abroad, principally through education, signaled a significant extension of women’s previous role in the mission field.

Despite the committee’s sending their first female agent abroad in 1859, the organization at home consisted mainly of sewing meetings. The appointment of Mrs. Caroline Wiseman as the Secretary in 1874 signaled a shift in pace and direction.¹³ “To no single person does the Women’s Work of Wesleyan Methodism owe so much as to Mrs. Wiseman. Her methods were autocratic, and her power could not be challenged. But her administrative ability, her force of character, and her public position made her contribution of inestimable value.”¹⁴ At a time when women usually did not hold professions or even have the right to vote, she was the first woman to be elected to a School Board following the Education Act of 1870. She brought this strong-willed and forward-looking attitude to the committee. After attending her first committee meeting, she returned home to her husband, The Rev. Luke Wiseman, and informed him that she would not be going again, as it was simply a clique of London ladies who had decided beforehand what was going to happen and never allowed anyone else the chance to speak! To this her husband simply replied, “Yes, you will . . . and in a short time you will have made another thing altogether of it, and a much larger one.” Nine months later, she had been left alone in London following the death of her husband, and fortunately for the women of Methodism, she did return, and her impact was remarkable. Her appointment as Secretary signaled the beginning of a great change, as “she roused an extraordinary amount of interest and inspired numbers of missionary volunteers and other workers.”¹⁵ She oversaw the introduction of medical work abroad and the birth of the longstanding Easter Offering.¹⁶ By the time of her death in 1912, over 200 women had been sent to the mission field. She had vigorously promoted the society at home and visited great swathes of the mission field abroad, driving the annual income from 2,000 to 22,000 pounds.¹⁷ Describing her as the “most notable Wesleyan woman of the century,”¹⁸ Findlay and Findlay wrote following her death: “Her memory supplies a great example of the use that God may make,

¹² Julia Waddy, “Summary of Work Undertaken by The Ladies’ Auxiliary Missionary Committee,” 1 in *Manual of the Proceedings of the Ladies’ Auxiliary Missionary Committee from 1859 to 1880*, uncatalogued, World Church Relationships Office, Methodist Church House, London.

¹³ Seton, *Western Daughters in Eastern Lands*, 96-97.

¹⁴ Davey, *The March of Methodism*, 135.

¹⁵ Anna M. Hellier, *Workers Together: The Story of the Women’s Auxiliary of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society* (London: Cargate, 1931), 53.

¹⁶ Findlay and Holdsworth, *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, 43. For further discussion of the Easter Offering, see below.

¹⁷ Seton, *Western Daughters in Eastern Lands*, 96-97.

¹⁸ Davey, *The March of Methodism*, 135.

in these modern times, of the influence and powers of a Christian woman.”¹⁹ “Mrs. Wiseman valued the past but lived for the future”²⁰—with this vision she transformed the movement into one which could face the future in modern and effective ways. Subsequent generations of Methodist women had, and still have, a lot to thank her for.

The story continues with the creation of the Girls’ League, which was formed in 1908 as a temporary junior part of Women’s Work to help with the Jubilee fund. Girls were expected to become JMA²¹ collectors and not to attend meetings with their mothers. Due to its success, the Girls’ League was turned into a permanent venture in 1909, with the membership ranging in age from teenagers to women of thirty. Originally formed as the Girls’ Medical League specifically to support medical work in Akbarpur in North India, by 1914 the term “medical” had eventually been dropped, as it was considered too limiting. The aim of the League was “to help the girls of Methodism to share in the full missionary life of the Christian Church.”²²

Gwen Ash, Girls’ League Secretary from 1937 to 1944 and an overseas missionary, described how Girls’ League was run:

Unlike most youth groups at the time this was not run by older folk for the young. We ran it ourselves, planning conferences, study groups, branch and district committees and so on. We made our own mistakes and learned from there, shared a wonderfully rich fellowship, and gained an excellent training in Christian leadership.²³

The League strengthened the whole Church through its commitment to prayer, study, and stewardship, with young women offering service both at home and overseas. Over the years, the Girls’ League fulfilled their aim by providing a steady stream of candidates for service overseas. Some of the most outstanding women leaders in British Methodism came from among its members.²⁴

In 1953, the decision was made for Girls’ League to join with the Young Men’s League to form the Youth Missionary Association, an organization to serve all youth of the Methodist Church.²⁵ Despite the sadness attached to losing Girls’ League and the indispensable role the movement had played as a junior part of Women’s Work, Sister Dorothy Farrar “called us to look forward as well as backwards . . . stepping into YMA not forgetting the heritage and tradition of Girls’ League but taking it with us into the greater opportuni-

¹⁹ George G. Findlay and Mary Grace Findlay, *Wesley’s World Parish: A Sketch of the Hundred Years’ Work of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913), 179.

²⁰ Cyril Davey and Hugh Thomas, *Together Travel On: A History of Women’s Work* (London: Corgate, 1984), 5.

²¹ See Junior Mission for All (JMA), accessed January 5, 2016, [http://www.methodist.org.uk/mission/junior-mission-for-all-\(jma\)](http://www.methodist.org.uk/mission/junior-mission-for-all-(jma)).

²² Davey and Thomas, *Together Travel On: A History of Women’s Work*, 9.

²³ Gwen Ash, *Ninety-Nine Not Out! Gwen Ash Recalls Events from Her Century*, 16.

²⁴ Davey and Thomas, *Together Travel On: A History of Women’s Work*, 9.

²⁵ Methodist Missionary Society Women’s Work, *Monthly Letter*, No.154, November, 1953, (London: Methodist Missionary Society), uncatalogued, World Church Relationships Office, Methodist Church House, London.

ty that is now ours, we have His word of promise that He will be with us.”²⁶

The origins of Women’s Fellowship, the next phase of the women’s movement in British Methodism, is described in an undated document from the archive:

The war [i.e., World War II] situation began it; a concern of our Home Mission Department in the early forties, when families were broken up, children evacuated, men, and for the first time, women called to the forces, women working in factories and on farms; when orthodox morality was crumbling, as it always does in time of “This is a woman’s job,” they said. “We must start in the home.”²⁷

In 1942, Dr. Colin Roberts and Mrs. Beta Hornabrook convened a group to discuss what could be done to train women for leadership, to co-ordinate the work of the various women’s meetings around the country, and to meet the social and pastoral needs of women whose lives had been disrupted by war. In 1944, the Women’s Fellowship was approved by the Home Mission Department of the Methodist Church and its aims set out: “To call women to Christian responsibility in home, Church, and community.”²⁸ Thus women began—or rather, continued—to transform the world, beginning in the kitchen and moving outward to home, church, and community, just as women had been working together all along, following the example of Susanna Wesley. Upon joining Women’s Fellowship, each woman pledged: “I accept the Call to Christian Womanhood and promise by God’s help to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, to make my home a place where He is loved, my Church a center where He is worshiped and my country a realm where He is honored.”²⁹ This personal challenge, during a time of war, influenced many women to take on further responsibility in their communities, serving with the WVS, the Samaritans, providing Meals on Wheels and as Magistrates.³⁰

Welfare Work formed a major part of the mission and outreach of Women’s Fellowship. The first Social and Moral Welfare worker, Sister Clare Powers, was appointed September of 1946. Two years later dreams were realized in the opening of a Mother and Baby Home in London. The home at 10 Rutford Road provided spiritual and physical care.³¹ Girls were provided with safe, reasonably priced lodgings where they learned mothering skills and gained a future-oriented perspective of Christian values. Year

²⁶ Sister Dorothy Farrar, “Report of Last Girls’ League Central Committee,” *Women’s Work*, April, 1954 (London: Methodist Missionary Society), uncatalogued, World Church Relationships Office, Methodist Church House, London.

²⁷ *Women’s Fellowship: It’s Aims and Origins*, undated, The Methodist Women Collection, Epworth Old Rectory, MWC 2015-1123.1.

²⁸ The Methodist Conference, Middlesbrough, Conference Agenda (1967), 272, Epworth Old Rectory Library, 29.9 1967 001.

²⁹ *Women’s Fellowship Promise Card*, The Methodist Women Collection, Epworth Old Rectory, MWC 2015-956.

³⁰ *Women’s Fellowship: It’s Aims and Origins*, undated, The Methodist Women Collection, Epworth Old Rectory, MWC 2015-1123.1.

³¹ *The Women’s Fellowship of the Methodist Church (Home Mission Department) What It Is and How It Works*, undated, 8, The Methodist Women Collection, Epworth Old Rectory, MWC 2015-1375.

after year, the reports to Methodist Conference note an ever-growing need for welfare work, with 90% of the girls at the Mother and Baby Home coming from Methodist homes and Sunday Schools.³²

The model of welfare work changed over time as Women's Fellowship responded to the ever-changing needs of society. In 1959, Annesley House opened its doors to provide temporary accommodation, mainly to unmarried women in the early stages of pregnancy, who needed to move away from home or who were unable to stay in their lodgings.³³ The Garth Hostel, another branch of welfare work, allowed girls coming to London during the post-war period to find lodgings which were "a Christian 'home from home' at a reasonable rent."³⁴ As the 1960s brought liberalization of attitudes in Britain toward sex and birth control, the Women's Fellowship responded accordingly. In 1972, the Mother and Baby Home was renamed Hornabrook House and converted into flatlets for single mothers and their children and offered a day nursery which allowed the mothers to find work. Annesley House became a hostel for young girls coming to London for the first time to work or study, a role it maintained until 2004 when the decision to close the house was made.³⁵

"The Young Wives" was born out of the Women's Fellowship movement. By 1953, over 100 groups had been established. These groups provided hope for the future as they encouraged more young people to join in the fellowship of the church.³⁶ Young Wives groups were vital in the setting up of infants' playgroups and toddlers' groups, thus providing families with a contact point with the church community.³⁷ "The Young Wives' Group has become one of the outstanding evangelistic agencies of our time. Through these groups many people come from the fringe into the center of Christian fellowship . . ."³⁸

During the 1980s, discussions began regarding a potential amalgamation between Women's Work and Women's Fellowship. The partnership was neither simple nor without its critics. Women's Fellowship and Women's

³² The Methodist Conference, Bristol, Conference Agenda (1948), 114, Epworth Old Rectory Library, 29.9 1948 001.

³³ *The Women's Fellowship of the Methodist Church (Home Mission Department) What It Is and How It Works*, undated, 8, The Methodist Women Collection, Epworth Old Rectory, MWC 2015-1375.

³⁴ *The Women's Fellowship of the Methodist Church (Home Mission Department) What It Is and How It Works*, undated, 9, The Methodist Women Collection, Epworth Old Rectory, MWC 2015-1375.

³⁵ See The Methodist Church, *A Statement on the Future of Annesley House*, March 5, 2004, The Methodist Women Collection, Epworth Old Rectory, MWC 2015-1152; and Margaret Sawyer, "A comfortable place," *Methodist Recorder* (April 1, 2004): 24, The Methodist Women Collection, Epworth Old Rectory, MWC 2015-1158.

³⁶ The Methodist Conference, Birmingham, Conference Agenda, (1953), 261, Epworth Old Rectory Library, 29.9 1953 001.

³⁷ The Methodist Conference, Birmingham, Conference Agenda, (1969), 277-278, Epworth Old Rectory Library, 29.9 1969 001.

³⁸ The Methodist Conference, Plymouth, Conference Agenda, (1965), 352, Epworth Old Rectory Library, 29.9 1965 001.

Work were part of different departments within the Methodist Church, with Women's Fellowship concerned with Home issues, and Women's Work concerned with overseas mission. Nonetheless, many Districts and Circuits already had joint presidents. In many churches, meetings had been held together for many years, as the same women were found to be attending both, and most were concerned with both home and overseas issues. Discussions had already taken place in the 1960s about joining together, but at that time the decision had been made to remain as separate movements, with closer liaison and integration.³⁹ By the late 1980s, the had changed. As the 1986 Methodist Conference agenda stated, "Over the years it has become clear that Women's Work and Women's Fellowship need not operate separately anymore. They share similar goals and much of the work is complementary and often undertaken by the same women."⁴⁰

A report of the Women's Work/Women's Fellowship Working Party from July of 1986 explains how the societal circumstances had changed since both organizations had been formed. With regard to Women's Work, the Overseas Division had worked hard to remove discrimination against women in the missionary service. By the 1980s, female missionaries were not supported specifically by Women's Work, and there had long been no distinction between Women's Work funds and the General Mission Fund. Similarly, Women's Fellowship was formed at a time when the country was focusing resources on rehabilitation and the rebuilding of the country in the wake of World War II, when the social casualties of war were being neglected. However, improvements had been made over the following decades, with help for these social casualties coming more from the community rather than from institutions.⁴¹ Ultimately the working party proposed that it was time for Women's Work and Women's Fellowship to share their heritage, experiences, and resources to form a new network. This newly-formed network would endeavor to meet the needs of all women, including those not associated with Women's Work or Women's Fellowship, while also embracing the concerns and traditions of both antecedent movements; to strive for a church in which equality between men and women prevailed but which also recognized that there was still a justification for a women's-only movement, one which would pay close attention to the needs of women while ensuring that barriers were not erected to prevent outreach work with the whole church. Thought about future structures was dominated by the awareness that Women's Work and Women's Fellowship should be blended together, ensuring that the strengths and insights of each were represented equally,

³⁹ The Methodist Church, London, Conference Agenda (1968), 296-302, Epworth Old Rectory Library, 29.9 1968 001.

⁴⁰ The Methodist Church, Stoke, Conference Agenda (1986), 62, Epworth Old Rectory Library, 29.9 1986 001.

⁴¹ *Outline of Future Work and Structures Proposed by the W.W./W.F. Working Party* (July, 1986), 2, uncatalogued document from Methodist Church House to be moved to The Methodist Archives and Research Centre (MARC) at The John Rylands Library in due course.

with neither dominating the new partnership.⁴²

While the proposed amalgamation of the two movements made sense to most, one woman, Brenda Mosedale, wrote quite passionately against the plans. She asked the question, "What do Women's Work and Women's Fellowship have in common except women?"⁴³ Going on to suggest that they were simply creating a movement for the sake of women and ignoring the fundamental roles both Women's Work and Women's Fellowship had played in their respective divisions, she suggested that by joining together simply because of the loose connection of women they were emphasizing the separateness of women, after work had been done to integrate the work of women into the wider work of the divisions over the past years. She concluded that the church should not separate women off, but that both men and women should be free to work for the good of the whole church. She claimed that women shouldn't be joining together simply because they were women, but that each movement should have worked towards greater integration within their respective divisions of the Methodist Church in Britain.⁴⁴

When the decision to join together was finally accepted, the critics did not stop. The archives contain a petition bearing 127 signatures from one Circuit of those who were not happy with the choice of name given to the new women's movement. The petition reads:

Hastings, Bexhill and Rye Circuit Women's Work and Women's Fellowship. We the undersigned do not approve of the new umbrella name of NETWORK for Women's Work and Women's Fellowship, nor MAGNET for the Women in Methodist Magazine. They do nothing for WOMEN, MISSION, or METHODISM. These names are the advertisements for British Railcard, the Child's Comic and Tins of Paint to name just three. We in this circuit will continue to use Women's Work and Fellowship.⁴⁵

Despite the opposition to the creation of a new movement and the new name, The Women's Network of the Methodist Church (Network) was launched in 1987 with the aims to encourage, enable, and equip. In 1996, the British Methodist Conference reflected upon the amalgamation: "The joining together of the two fringes, Women's Work and Women's Fellowship, came about after much consultation, sheer hard work and a willingness to "let go."⁴⁶

"Network . . . is an attempt at a structure that enables, encourages and equips women, whether they belong to a group or not, to find their own special place and make their own unique contribution to the life of the church

⁴² *Outline of Future Work and Structures Proposed by the W.W./W.F. Working Party*, 3.

⁴³ Brenda Mosedale, *Women in the Church* (January 30, 1986), uncatalogued document from Methodist Church House to be moved to The Methodist Archives and Research Centre (MARC) at The John Rylands Library in due course.

⁴⁴ Mosedale, *Women in the Church*.

⁴⁵ Hastings, Bexhill and Rye Circuit Women's Work and Women's Fellowship, *Petition*, undated, uncatalogued document from Methodist Church House to be moved to The Methodist Archives and Research Centre (MARC) at The John Rylands Library in due course.

⁴⁶ The Methodist Church, Blackpool, Conference Agenda, Volume One (1996), 44, Epworth Old Rectory Library, 29.9 1996 001.

and community. In Network we are building on the past, not trampling it underfoot or trying to hide it, it is part of our heritage and we are proud of it.”⁴⁷ While remembering the past and looking to the future, the work of Network was wide and varied, ranging from social action projects, to international exchanges and major Connexional events and welfare work.

Women’s Network addressed many different topics through the work of many different task groups during its existence. Across Britain, women were encouraged to learn more and then campaign on issues. Awareness was raised about issues such as domestic violence, the trafficking of women and children across Europe, racial justice, and the concerns of older people within the church. The welfare work of Women’s Fellowship continued through Annesley House, which was run as a hostel for young women working or studying in London for the first time. Ecumenically women involved themselves in the Women’s World Day of Prayer and the boycotting of Nestle products.⁴⁸

“Over the Rainbow” was the first national event of Network organized to raise awareness of the situation in South Africa. On June 16, 1990, four thousand men, women and children descended on Methodist Central Hall and Kennington Park to stand in silent solidarity with their brothers and sisters of South Africa, both black and white. The title “Over the Rainbow” was chosen for the day of celebration because of its connotations of covenant, promise, hope, color, of justice, love, and peace for all.⁴⁹ The Black Sash Movement in South Africa was the inspiration: it was a movement of mothers of all races and ethnicities joining together through a concern for the welfare of their children. They made panels of Ribbon which were displayed together as a silent protest against injustice, and showed how women were working together to overcome the barriers and suffering of apartheid. Many of the panels of their Ribbon were destroyed or confiscated by the police.⁵⁰

Inspired by these actions, Network wanted women in the Methodist Church in Britain to join together and create their own Ribbon as a sign that they believed in the need for justice and peace in South Africa, thereby creating a visual expression of their love and concern.

Network continues to develop ways of relating to women of other continents as well as our own.

We have felt drawn to the voices of black and white women in South Africa, working

⁴⁷ The Women’s Network of the Methodist Church, *Weaving Network* (1992), 2, The Methodist Women Collection, Epworth Old Rectory, MWC 2015-978.

⁴⁸ See: The Women’s Network of the Methodist Church, *What Shall We Do Now? Christian Resources for Older People*, The Methodist Women Collection, Epworth Old Rectory, MWC 2015-863; The Methodist Church, *SANGAM Coming Together: One Race The Human Race*, 2003, The Methodist Women Collection, Epworth Old Rectory, MWC 2015-1388 and <http://www.wwdp.org.uk/>.

⁴⁹ “Rainbow People: Message of Hope for South Africa”, *Methodist Recorder*, June 21, 1990, The Methodist Women Collection at Epworth Old Rectory, MWC 2015-858.

⁵⁰ See <http://www.blacksash.org.za/index.php/our-legacy/our-history>, accessed December 16, 2015.

together to secure a positive future for their children, and supporting one another through the daily indignities that living under the system of apartheid makes inevitable.

Christ promises us all “Life in all its fullness”—a gift for all humankind and so the challenge comes to each one of us to proclaim that gift to others and to denounce all that stands in the way; in this case—the injustice of South African life and the resultant powerlessness, inequality and oppression for the majority of the population.⁵¹

Following the celebration and vigil, the message of love and hope and solidarity was taken to all four corners of the world as Ribbons were exchanged across the Connexion and around the world.⁵² “It really was a memorable day for Network The silent vigil was tremendously moving and a very powerful witness, the full significance of which we cannot measure. And this is not the end. There truly is a crock of gold at the end of the Rainbow.”⁵³

The “Vision of Peace” program was launched in 1993 and encouraged women across the Connexion to celebrate belonging to the World Church, to listen and share the insights of people of many cultures, and to learn from one another by asking each District to focus on both an overseas country and a home issue. Women were encouraged to learn about that country’s life and culture, to make connections and friendships where possible, and to learn what the desired vision of peace looked like—and also what was destructive to that peace. Local issues, studied simultaneously, ranged from support of local hospices, to women against pit closures, homelessness, special care baby units, and women and disability.⁵⁴ The program culminated in a national celebration, the “Vision of Peace” Day, held on June 9, 1994 at The Royal Centre, Nottingham. The Centre was filled with colorful and informative displays and banners featuring countries such as Panama and Costa Rica, China, Haiti, Bolivia, Peru, Mali, and Sudan, and issues such as pollution, women’s refuge, rural stress, child abuse, HIV/Aids, survey of provision of care for the elderly, and homelessness.⁵⁵ The *Methodist Recorder* reported that expectations for the event had been far exceeded, with twenty-nine out of the thirty-three Districts participating and many projects and partnerships being engaged in by Network women, both at home and abroad.⁵⁶ Network President Elizabeth Dunn Wilson reflected that “The enthusiasm and dedication shown by so many in the search for a vision of peace for our world has been wonderful.”⁵⁷

⁵¹ Women’s Network, *The Ribbon*, undated, The Methodist Women Collection at Epworth Old Rectory, MWC 2015-927.4.

⁵² “Network Special: Following the Rainbow,” *Magnet* (Winter, 1990/91): 6, The Methodist Women Collection at Epworth Old Rectory, MWC 2015-927.7.

⁵³ Stella Bristow, “Over the Rainbow 16 June 1990,” *Magnet* 12 (Autumn, 1990): 6, The Methodist Women Collection at Epworth Old Rectory, MWC 2015-890.12.

⁵⁴ The Women’s Network of the Methodist Church, *Weaving Network*, 2nd edition, undated, 22-23, The Methodist Women Collection at Epworth Old Rectory, MWC 2015-852.

⁵⁵ The Methodist Church, Leeds, Conference Agenda, Volume One (1994), 82, Epworth Old Rectory Library, 29.9 1994 001.

⁵⁶ Avril Bottoms, “Vision of Peace,” *Methodist Recorder* (June 16, 1994): 11, 14.

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Dunn Wilson, “Explore our Vision: Pray for More,” *Magnet* 27 (Autumn, 1994): 6.

International exchanges took place within the formative years of Network, affording women in Britain the opportunity to exchange experiences, training, and faith with women from Kenya, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, Germany, and Estonia. It was reported to the British Methodist Conference in 1996 that the first exchange between Britain and Kenya allowed women “to visit each other’s homes and share faith at a very deep level.”⁵⁸ Network concluded that the fringe benefits of this exchange and subsequent European ones were immeasurable.⁵⁹ Joyce Powell, a participant on the exchange with Slovakia and the Czech Republic in 1990, said, “We learned so much about what those women and their families had gone through under the Nazis and then the Communists. Our understanding and our prayers have been transformed by these exchanges.”⁶⁰

Magnet magazine, the magazine of Network, has been a source of information and inspiration to many women—and men—since 1987. *Magnet* reflected the aims and the interests of the movement and began with a print run of 13,000.⁶¹ “*Magnet* is . . . very much the mouthpiece of Network and is pivotal to it and although produced by women, it is offered as a resource for the whole Church.”⁶² *Magnet* magazine continues to the present day, and although it is no longer produced by the women’s movement of Methodism, their input to the editorial board is still ever-present.

“We have much more credibility and respect now for what we are doing. In the past, the women’s movement was valued, in a patronizing way, mostly for its money-raising ability and social care Women make up much of the membership of the Methodist Church and it is good now to realize that we are part of its lifeblood, which means being taken seriously in the decision-making bodies and being treated with the respect we deserve.”⁶³

Methodist Women in Britain (MWiB) was launched in July of 2011, with the press release stating that it was “A women’s movement that combines spirituality and social action in a global context is the vision for a new organization . . . bringing together Women’s Network and the British Unit of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women (WFMUCW),⁶⁴ but also going beyond both existing organizations, Methodist Women in

⁵⁸ The Methodist Church, Blackpool, Conference Agenda, Volume One (1996), 44, Epworth Old Rectory Library, 29.9 1996 001.

⁵⁹ The Methodist Church, Blackpool, Conference Agenda, Volume One (1996), 44, Epworth Old Rectory Library, 29.9 1996 001.

⁶⁰ Joyce Powell, “Transforming the World From the Kitchen? The Story of Women Working Together in British Methodism,” European Methodist Historical Conference, Ruse, Bulgaria, September 11, 2015.

⁶¹ The Methodist Church, London, Conference Agenda, (1988), 49, Epworth Old Rectory Library, 29.9 1988 001 Conference Agenda London.

⁶² Avril Bottoms, “Reflecting on a Decade of Networking: Retiring Connexional Network Secretary Stella Bristow Talks to Avril Bottoms,” *Methodist Recorder* (August 27, 1998), 9.

⁶³ Avril Bottoms, “Reflecting on a Decade of Networking,” 9.

⁶⁴ See <http://wfmucw.org/> and <http://www.mwib.org.uk/about-us/wfmucwmain/british-unit-wfmucw.html> for more information on the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women.

Britain is committed to generating creative space for new women's groups and individuals from diverse backgrounds."⁶⁵

MWiB was formed following three years of discussion and discernment after a Connexional reshuffle by the Methodist Church which saw the Women's Network Connexional office removed. Kathleen Pearson reflected on what the new organization would mean:

Women's Network brings to the table a track record of significant work on domestic violence, human trafficking, and other social issues. In the new organization that work will be set in a global context The rights we enjoy—to clean water, adequate nutrition, health care, good housing, access to education, decent pay, and personal safety—are still a dream for many of our sisters around the world. We want to stand with them in their struggle.⁶⁶

Launched under the theme, "For such a time as this . . . ," the first President of MWiB, Jill Baker wrote, "Some Methodist women in Britain today want a cause to fight for, others long to read the Bible in new ways; others may need to find a prayer about work-life balance; others to find a group where a lonely enquirer can be embraced the vision of the recent Forum is that MWiB will step up to the mark "for such a time as this."⁶⁷

MWiB has taken its aim from its parent organizations and encourages, enables, and equips women to know Christ and make Him known. Now into its fifth year and with its third President, MWiB has continued the tradition of working hard to bring about change in the church, the community, and the wider world. MWiB has also continued in the tradition of producing resource packs to aid in the understanding of issues relevant in society, namely Dalit Solidarity and Dementia Friendly Church.⁶⁸ MWiB together with WFMUCW is also committed to the United Nations (UN) Millennium Development goals (MDGs),⁶⁹ and following a World Federation Day held in October of 2015, is committed to seventeen new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out by the UN to be reviewed in 2030.⁷⁰ This pledge restates MWiB's commitment to work for justice within a global setting.

Another tradition maintained by MWiB is that of the Easter Offering. Begun in 1883, the offering has its roots in Women's Work and reflects the long history of commitment to overseas work by the women of Methodism. The idea originated in Manchester with a group of women to collect "Christmas pennies" to help fund missionary work overseas. Mrs. Wiseman

⁶⁵ MWiB Press Release, February 15, 2010, The Methodist Women Collection at Epworth Old Rectory, MWC 2016-1389.

⁶⁶ MWiB Press Release.

⁶⁷ Jill Baker, "For Such a Time as This?" *Methodist Recorder* (June 9, 2011), available at <http://www.mwib.org.uk/resources/publications/articles-and-reports/item/297-for-such-a-time-as-this-mr-article.html>.

⁶⁸ See <http://www.mwib.org.uk/resources/publications/dalit-resource-pack.html> and <http://www.mwib.org.uk/item/569-dementia-friendly-churches.html>.

⁶⁹ See <http://www.mwib.org.uk/about-us/wfmucwmain/british-unit-wfmucw.html> and <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/> for more information.

⁷⁰ See http://www.mwib.org.uk/images/stories/Newsletters/Newsletter_Winter2015.pdf and <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs> for more information.

however thought that it should become an Easter Offering, where each family made an offering to the mission fund, and so in March of 1884, Easter envelopes and collecting bags were distributed among the London Districts. Families were asked to contribute a penny a head; just over £100 was collected. Due to this success, the idea grew, and by 1900 the amount raised totaled £1,655. In 1903, Easter offerings were extended to all country chapels. "Let us bear in mind," they wrote, "the importance of the 'Littles'. . . . Through gifts great and small, the Easter Offering has become a significant feature of the World Church."⁷¹

The research for this article has been initiated by MWiB as part of a Heritage and Archives Task Group, in order to create a new "Methodist Women Collection," to be housed at Epworth Old Rectory. The culmination of the MWiB project will be an exhibition which demonstrating how women in Methodism have always been "transforming the world from the kitchen," telling the story of the past while also making links to the contemporary work of MWiB.⁷²

As this article has shown, the women of Methodism have always been proactive in finding new ways to work together. Taking their inspiration from Susanna Wesley, the Mother of Methodism, who instructed her children in the right way from the kitchen of The Old Rectory, ensuing generations of Methodist women have worked hard to transform the world from the kitchen. Men and women have not always enjoyed the same rights and privileges in the Methodist Church in Britain, but it is readily apparent that the women's movement in British Methodism has made amazing contributions to the whole church.

⁷¹ See Easter Offering, accessed December 18, 2015, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/prayer-and-worship/lent-and-easter/easter-offering>.

⁷² For information regarding the exhibition please contact the author, Sarah Braisdell at sgbraisdell@gmail.com or visit <http://www.epwortholdrectory.org.uk/> (Epworth Old Rectory at 1 Rectory Street, Epworth, North Lincolnshire DN9 1HX).