

**WESLEY DEACONESS-EVANGELISTS:
EXPLORING REMNANTS OF REVIVALISM IN
LATE 19TH CENTURY BRITISH METHODISM**

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Throughout the 19th century British Methodist women participated in evangelistic work embodying aspects of revivalism. The most powerful examples of this occurred among the Bible Christian¹ and Primitive Methodist² traditions in which women were encouraged to preach in the first decades of the 19th century. Both traditions were strongly revivalist. Among the Primitive Methodists, especially during the early stages of the movement, women preachers were highly valued for their uniqueness and their special contributions to the cause of spreading the Gospel.

There were some . . . who pressed [her] to preach at a village on her way home. She [Mary Taft] consented, and in the overflowing congregation which the novelty of the preacher's sex and youth drew together, were three persons from Derby, who, under the influence of a powerful service and the preacher's personality, besought her to visit Derby the following night.³

Women also served as lay evangelists in the *Joyful News Mission* established by the Wesleyan Methodist minister Rev. Thomas Champness in 1885. These female lay evangelists, along with the United Methodist Free Church⁴ Deaconesses founded by the Rev. T. J. Cope in 1891, and the Wesley Deaconesses founded by Thomas Bowman Stephenson in 1890, led evangelistic Mission services across Great Britain.

¹Bible Christians originated in 1815 when William O'Bryan a local preacher in the Wesleyan Methodist Church reluctantly separated from the denomination. O'Bryan founded the first society in North Devon and the movement spread mainly across Southern England from Cornwall to Kent.

²The Primitive Methodist Church formed in 1811 with the uniting of two movements, Hugh Bourne's Camp Meeting Methodists and William Clowes with his followers, both expelled from the Wesleyan Methodist Church.

³H. B. Kendall, *The Origins and History of Primitive Methodism* (London: Edwin Dalton, n.d.), 1: 195.

⁴The United Methodist Free Churches originated with the amalgamation of three smaller groups separated from the Wesleyan Methodist Church: the Protestant Methodists formed in 1827, the Wesleyan Methodist Association formed in 1835, and the Wesleyan Reformers formed in 1849. The two former bodies joined in 1836 resulting in the Wesleyan Methodist Association and combined with the Wesleyan Reformers in 1857. Each of the divisions occurred as a result of disputes over greater lay rights and democratic practice in the face of growing Annual Conference power.

Within the Wesleyan Methodist Church the evangelistic work of women with connections to revivalism was unusual. Examples of women's ministry are more prevalent among the smaller Methodist denominations such as Bible Christians and Primitive Methodists. These smaller denominations also demonstrated the strongest currents of revivalism among British Methodists in the 19th century. Revivalism itself was looked down upon by Wesleyan Methodists. However, women and revivalism joined together in a subversive undercurrent within the Wesleyan denomination due to the confluence of several factors at the turn of the century. These factors included the position and power of the founder of the Deaconess movement in Wesleyan Methodism, the influential heritage of the first Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist, and Wesleyan Methodism's acceptance of open-air preaching in the late 19th century. This article will consider the impact of the above factors on the presence of revivalist undercurrents in the ministry of the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist.

The growing homogeneity of British Methodism during the closing decades of the 19th century is widely recognized with regard to its ever increasing majority representation of the middle class.⁵

Certainly [Wesleyan Methodists] were not really a 'working class' Church in terms of the mass of urban workers; the middle class nature of Wesleyanism was noted at the time.⁶

The growing membership of the middle classes demonstrated the rising respectability of the maturing denomination and its leadership. However, this portrayal of Wesleyan Methodism is not without exception. As Henry Rack has pointed out,

Certain strata and certain areas in Wesleyanism continued to be attracted by revivalism; the ways of rural members often differed little to the outward eye between Wesleyan and Primitive [Methodism]; revivalism, 'perfection' and the use of rural 'lay agents' were combined in the 'Joyful News' mission founded by the Wesleyan Thomas Champness. All this was often somewhat far removed in spirit from the official leadership [of Wesleyan Methodism].⁷

Thomas Champness' *Joyful News Mission*, which consisted of a newspaper aimed at revivalist reporting and the training of both men and women to work as lay evangelists, represented one of the significant revivalist undercurrents in late 19th century Wesleyan Methodism. Implicit in Rack's state-

⁵Clive Field, "The Social Structure of English Methodism, Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries," in *British Journal of Sociology* 28: 2 (June 1977), 199; Henry Rack, "Wesleyan Methodism 1849-1902," in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, eds. Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George, and Gordon Rupp (London: Epworth Press, 1983), 3: 127; Anthony Armstrong, *The Church of England, Methodists and Society, 1700-1850* (London: University of London Press, Ltd., 1973), 207.

⁶Henry Rack, "Wesleyan Methodism 1849-1902," 132.

⁷Henry Rack, "Wesleyan Methodism 1849-1902," 127.

ment comparing the apparent similarities of Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist members in rural areas is a pervasive rivalry between these denominational traditions. Some of Wesleyan Methodism's desire to achieve middle class respectability is woven together with a desire to put distance between itself and the less structured, more emotional movements such as Primitive Methodism. Efforts on the part of Wesleyan Methodism to establish distance between itself and other movements represented an attempt to justify itself as a 'church' of equal validity with the Church of England.⁸

The Reverend Doctor Thomas Bowman Stephenson, the founder of the Wesley Deaconess Order as well as the definer of the subsequent role of Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist, embodied an archetype for the middle class respectability so highly sought by Wesleyan Methodism. Stephenson, also the founder of the more celebrated project, The Children's Home, served as an influential leader in late 19th century Wesleyan Methodism. In addition to his sponsorship and organization of charitable work, Stephenson participated in pan-Methodist efforts which worked toward the later unions within British Methodism.⁹ Stephenson contributed to the composition and publication of Methodist hymnody and in 1891 was elected to the highest office within Wesleyan Methodism, President of the Conference.

According to Rack, persons espousing revivalism were typically removed from Wesleyan Methodist leadership as a result of religious society's less than respectable perception of revivalist persons. However, Thomas Bowman Stephenson's election in 1891 to the office of President of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference certainly placed him in the category of denominational leadership and yet he remained receptive to the undercurrents of revivalism. Stephenson's biographer refers to the work of Thomas Champness and his training of women lay evangelists as an influence upon Stephenson's own project, the Wesley Deaconess Order.¹⁰ Stephenson's interest in utilizing the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist to organize and lead Mission services created an interesting dichotomy in Stephenson's ministry as a recognized leader within the denomination. Stephenson held in tension both mainline 'respectability' and the subversive undercurrent of 'revivalism.' It is within this context of seemingly opposing and competing trends that the ministry of the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist emerged. Her ministry

⁸According to John Munsey Turner in *Conflict and Reconciliation: Studies in Methodism and Ecumenism in England, 1740-1982* (London: Epworth Press, 1985), 125-126, "The Oxford Movement was certainly a factor in a growing ecclesial self-consciousness in Wesleyanism . . . within Methodism there was a deep hurt at being unchurched by the Tractarians which led to an assertion of churchliness, typified at a minor point by ministers wearing clerical robes."

⁹In 1932, the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist Churches joined with the United Methodist Free Churches to form The Methodist Church and included almost the entirety of English Methodism.

¹⁰William Bradfield, *The Life of Thomas Bowman Stephenson, B.A., LL.D., D.D.* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1913), 179, 288-289.

managed to embody this peculiar combination of respectability and revivalist themes, therefore creating a respectable revivalism.

I

According to Stephenson, Wesley Deaconesses engaged in a variety of work falling into three main categories. The following is a summary of the Wesley Deaconesses' "three great fields of usefulness" outlined by Stephenson just prior to the establishment of the Wesley Deaconess Order and the first petition for its official recognition by the Wesleyan Methodist Conference.

1. Moral and spiritual education, in connexion with orphanages and industrial schools, both at home and in the missionary field.
2. The ministry to the sick, especially the sick poor
3. Evangelistic visitation, in connexion with circuits, with congregations, perhaps with groups of village congregations, and certainly in connexion with mission centres.¹¹

In the early days of Stephenson's organization of women's work, division of roles existed between ministry with children fulfilled by the Sisters of the Children working with The Children's Home, and ministry through nursing and evangelistic work carried out by Wesley Deaconesses. During this time of initial development, Stephenson also gave the following classifications of Deaconess work in his *Preliminary Prospectus*: care of children, nursing, and mission work.¹² The third classification of mission work was later subdivided into more specific areas such as circuit work, urban mission work, work in villages, or foreign mission work. In a later description of Deaconess work in the movement's publication from 1904, the following duties were listed under the title 'Home Missionary Work': organizing and producing special missions, mission bands, and open-air services.¹³ Not until this mention of missions and open-air services did the role of the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist include any tendency toward revivalism as a characteristic of her style of evangelism.

The title of Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist was first officially used for Sister Jeanie Banks in 1901, but Wesley Deaconesses directly involved in evangelistic activities significantly predate the use of the title. In addition to other Deaconesses serving generally as Mission Sisters, Sister Jeanie Banks was engaged specifically in 'Evangelistic Work' as a Wesley Deaconess continuously from 1896 until her death in 1932.

¹¹Bradfield, 294.

¹²Bradfield, 300.

¹³"What They Do," *Flying Leaves* 37 (December 1904), 166.

Sister Jeanie Banks, Wesley Deaconess, is wholly devoted to evangelistic work. She has been at work without intermission since the beginning of September, in various parts of the country, and God has greatly blessed her labours.¹⁴

A steady demand for Sister Jeanie Banks' evangelistic work and therefore the implication of the acceptance of her ministry was demonstrated by the steady requests for her services from the commencement of her evangelistic work. This overwhelming acceptance of Sister Banks' evangelistic endeavors may be one reason Stephenson felt justified in granting Banks the first use of the title of Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist in 1901.

Another contributing rationale for Banks as the first recipient of the title Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist was her influential Methodist and evangelistic heritage. Little biographical information exists for Banks. The following excerpt is from a regularly published column in *The Methodist Recorder* profiling women workers in the church.

For eighteen years Sister Jeanie has laboured almost unceasingly amongst the poor and outcast—for eight years in the East End Mission, and for ten years in Evangelistic Mission work in England, Ireland, and Scotland and the neighbouring isles. For several summers she has done both evangelistic and nursing work with the fishing fleets at Stornoway and Fraserburgh; and more recently in the Shetland Isles, whither she expects to go to the end of May. During the past autumn and winter Sister Jeanie has held Mission services in Ireland, where wonderful and gracious outpourings of the Spirit have been manifest.¹⁵

This article mentions Banks' father, the late Reverend Matthew Banks, "one of the early West Indian Missionaries" as well as her relation to the Reverend Dr. John Shaw Banks. A theological Tutor at Headingly College and President of the Conference in 1902–1903, John Shaw Banks was a notable preacher and scholar of his day.¹⁶ Sister Jeanie Banks' family interest in missions and involvement in the Wesleyan Methodist Church most likely proved advantageous to her acceptance in the role as the first Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist.

II

There exist surprising similarities shared by the Mission services of the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelists and the Primitive Methodist practice of "protracted meetings" from the middle of the 19th century and camp meetings from the early 19th century. Such parallels are unanticipated since much of the disdain between Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism centered around form and practice of worship. Wesleyan Methodists in the late 19th

¹⁴Thomas Bowman Stephenson, "news/advertisement," *Highways and Hedges* 110 (February 1897), 42.

¹⁵"Women Who Work," *The Methodist Recorder* (April 19, 1906), 390.

¹⁶"Conference Portraits," *The Methodist Recorder* (July 22, 1897), 519; "The New President," *The Methodist Recorder* (July 24, 1902), 721.

century generally held the opinion that the Primitive Methodist styles of worship embodied in the revivalist methods of camp meetings, protracted meetings, and even the early use of women preachers, did not adhere to the values of growing middle class respectability. Wesley Deaconess-Evangelists' Mission services would meet over several consecutive evenings in one location, usually for one to two weeks. As Sister Banks observed,

I understand "an Evangelist" to mean, in this particular connection, one who undertakes to conduct Special Missions, extending over the limited space of ten or twelve days or thereabouts.¹⁷

The Primitive Methodist protracted meeting also took place on several consecutive nights in the same chapel and typically lasted one to two weeks, often during the winter months when agricultural work was lightest. The protracted meeting, a descendant of the camp meeting from earlier in the century, was characteristic of Primitive Methodism in the 1840s and 1850s when the aim was not only to convert the unchurched but also to rekindle the lukewarm.¹⁸

The camp meeting, highly favored by Primitive Methodism early in the century, was imported from North America by the evangelist Lorenzo Dow.¹⁹ In the British context camp meetings closely reflected their North American counterparts. Early on camp meetings were usually held on a Sunday in summer beginning in the morning and lasting until around six or seven in the evening. Only later did the meetings begin to extend across weekends to three or four days. In both contexts preachers would alternately offer sermons and testimonies interspersed with prayer and hymn singing. The North American camp meeting differed from its British relative only in that individuals and family groups were willing to travel long distances to set up camp for four or five days. As a result of the camp meeting's quick introduction to the British environment the 1807 Wesleyan Conference judged harshly against the camp meeting.

Question: What is the judgment of the Conference concerning what are called Camp Meetings?

Answer: It is our judgment that, even supposing such meetings to be allowable in America, they are highly improper in England, and likely to be productive of considerable mischief. And we disclaim all connexion with them.²⁰

¹⁷Sister Jeanie Banks, "Experiences of an Evangelist," *Flying Leaves* (June/July 1902), 106–107.

¹⁸James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 226–227. The protracted meetings of the Primitive Methodists would have a different preacher or preachers each night, however, there is little evidence to substantiate the Wesleyan Methodist practice regarding preachers other than the leadership of the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelists.

¹⁹George Herod, *Historical and Biographical Sketches, Forming a Compendium of the History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion, up to the year 1823* (London: T. King, 1857), 212, 460.

²⁰"The Wesleyan Reaction, taken from the Wesleyan Conference Minutes, 1807," in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, eds. Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George and Gordon Rupp (London: Epworth Press, 1988), 4: 320–321.

Wesleyan Methodism quietly withdrew their criticism of activities related to camp meetings by the opening decade of the 20th century. By allowing the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist to lead Mission services and by reconsidering open-air preaching in general, Wesleyan Methodism tolerated undercurrents of revivalism.

Despite the animosity between Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism that focused on issues related to revivalism and resulted in the split between them, late 19th century Wesley Deaconess-Evangelists maintained an intimate connection with revivalism through their Mission services. Clear parallels exist in accounts of late 19th and early 20th century Wesleyan Methodist Mission services and early 19th century Primitive Methodist camp meetings. Examples of such accounts were provided by Sister Jeanie Banks and Hugh Bourne, one of the major instigators of the Primitive Methodist movement. With the exception of the last stages of conversion, which for Primitive Methodists culminated in entire or full sanctification, the process of conversion described in the accounts of worship of Banks and Bourne are strikingly familiar. The following discussion will compare the importance of prayer, the role of the sermon, and the place of pardon and assurance in the accounts of worship settings given by Banks and Bourne in their traditions of Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism.

The accounts of both Sister Jeanie Banks and Hugh Bourne grant significance to the role of prayer within the process of conversion. The following statement describes the importance of prayer preceding a Mission service led by Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist Jeanie Banks.

Christian laborers, Sunday School teachers, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, lovers and friends were all rejoicing over dear ones prayed for, and now saved. 'That's my son,' cried one; 'this is my brother,' said another . . . 'I knew it would come! I have been praying for this!'²¹

Personal petitions for the conversion of relatives and friends often in the context of prayer meetings assembled in private homes after chapel services contributed greatly to the ethos of anticipation that permeated the Mission services. A brief article chronicling a mid-19th-century Primitive Methodist protracted meeting begins by describing "a growing desire for a revival of the work of God; and many earnest prayers for the purpose were offered up both in private and public."²² In Bourne's description of the first English

²¹Sister Jeanie Banks, "A Year's Evangelism," *Highways and Hedges* 118 (October 1897), 234.

²²"A 'Protracted Meeting' in Norfolk," excerpt from *Primitive Methodist Magazine* (1857), 170–171, in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, eds. Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George and Gordon Rupp (London: Epworth Press, 1988), 4: 518–519. During the tenure of a Primitive Methodist protracted meeting, afternoon prayer-meetings complemented the nightly worship meetings. "The afternoon prayer-meetings were well sustained; at each a gracious influence was felt, and three broken-hearted penitents professed to obtain 'peace with God'. The result of these services will be fully known in time, but as far as we can ascertain at present, they are very encouraging."

Camp Meetings he refers to prayer as one of the major components of the camp meeting along with exhortation, preaching, and testimony.²³

Central to Bourne's description of conversion was the hearing of a message by an individual, which was often more of a testimony than a sermon. The typical testimonial exhortation would make such an impression on the individual that the penitent was moved to pray. While the person prayed, the Lord enabled the person to feel the weight of his/her sins, resulting in cries for mercy.²⁴ The proclamation of a message was central to the Wesleyan Methodist accounts, along with the important focal point of the communion rail or mourners' bench. However, unlike a camp meeting that might have several individuals preaching simultaneously, the Mission service contains a message that is delivered singularly within the context of the meeting organized by the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist. The person seeking justification and assurance would embark upon the voluntary journey to the communion rail or mourners' bench motivated by the proclamation of the Gospel or 'the Word,' which invited and challenged the listener to respond to God's offer of grace.

He listens to the Word, which sticks like arrows in his soul, until, wounded and sore, he opens his pew door, and voluntarily comes up to the communion rail . . . weeping and sobbing aloud.²⁵

Once convicted of sin the listener's movement forward to the communion rail, penitents' form, mourners' bench, or anxious pew, signaled the Mission preacher to pray with the listener for God's mercy and forgiveness.

Similar themes of 'wounding' and 'mourning' in Banks' account of the Wesleyan Methodist Mission services also pervade Bourne's Primitive Methodist accounts. Bourne alludes to arrows and their symbolism for the conviction of sin in as yet unrepentant sinners. "A Sabbath in which Jesus Christ made glad the hearts of his saints, and sent his arrows to the hearts of sinners."²⁶ The repetition of statements similar to the following demonstrates the persistence of mourning as a theme in Primitive Methodist camp meet-

²³ Hugh Bourne, "The First English Camp Meeting," in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, eds. Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George and Gordon Rupp (London: Epworth Press, 1988), 4: 316–317.

²⁴ Hugh Bourne, "The First English Camp Meeting," 318. In the Primitive Methodist context of camp meetings several 'preaching-stands' were usually raised among the crowds, four in this account, to assist worship leaders in proclaiming to and praying with the worshipping people. The purpose of the testimonial message to move persons toward conversion would often be woven together with prayer for individuals resulting in an extemporaneous proclamation style. "So many hundreds now covered the ground that another preaching-stand was erected in a distant part of the field, under the cover of a stone wall. Returning over the field, I met a company at a distance from the first stand, praying for a man in distress. . . . Nearer the first stand was another company praying with mourners."

²⁵ Sister Jeanie Banks, "A Year's Evangelism," 235.

²⁶ Hugh Bourne, "The First English Camp Meeting," 319.

ing revival services. “The preachers seemed to be fired with an uncommon zeal, and an extraordinary unction attended their word, while tears were seen flowing, and sinners trembling on every side.”²⁷ In both Banks’ and Bourne’s accounts, the prayers for conversion were answered by the Lord granting pardon to the repentant sinners, followed by assurance of salvation. Bourne depicted the conversion of an individual at a Primitive Methodist camp meeting: “Immediately the man in the other company was praising God, and I found that he had obtained the pardon of his sins, and was born again.”²⁸ Sister Jeanie Banks expressed a full account of a conversion experience, including a mournful conviction followed by the assurance of pardon, that illustrates the parallels shared between the Primitive Methodist services and her own.

A veteran servant of the devil, voluntarily left his seat, and, dropping on his knees at the communion-rail, laid hold of my hand, crying, as the tears coursed down his furrowed cheeks. ‘I will; I will.’ Soon . . . even though his was a long accumulation of guilt, ‘the Holy Spirit entered,’ and he ‘was born of God.’²⁹

The Wesley Deaconess-Evangelists’ Mission services as described by Sister Jeanie Banks closely resemble the early revivalist practices of Primitive Methodism in their processes of conversion, including prayer, testimonial messages, and the use of similar language.

Wesleyan Methodism, although hesitant to admit the value of revivalist methods such as open-air preaching, finally accepted its validity and retracted its disapproval of the practice in the first decade of the 20th century. The Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist preached in the open-air before Wesleyan Methodism offered its approval of the method. The action of the Deaconess-Evangelist helped maintain Wesleyan links with revivalism. Numerous articles appeared throughout *The Methodist Recorder* after the turn of the century passionately arguing for the acceptance of this lost art in British Methodism. The following statement, paraphrased from John Wesley’s *Large Minutes* (1763), harkens back to Wesley and Whitefield’s pioneering efforts as field preachers.

- ✓ Is it not also laid down as a part of every faithful Methodist preacher’s commission? The printed directions given to each Methodist minister at his ordination contain the exhortations, ‘Whenever the weather will permit, go out in the name of the Lord into the most public places, and call upon all to repent and believe the gospel; every Sunday in particular, especially where there are old societies, lest they should settle on their foes.’³⁰

²⁷Bourne, 318.

²⁸Bourne, 318; Sister Jeanie Banks, “A Year’s Evangelism,” 235. The language “pardon of sins” and “born again” seems to refer respectively to the Wesleyan understanding of the doctrines of justification and sanctification.

²⁹Banks, 235.

³⁰Reverend H. M. Nield, “Into the Highways—A Plea for Open-Air Preaching,” *The Methodist Recorder* (July 3, 1902), 639. The irony of this statement supporting the reconsideration of open-air preaching by Wesleyan Methodism lies in its use by H. B. Kendall, one of the most

The pleas of Wesleyan Methodism for open-air preaching were not in vain. The *Proceedings of the Methodist Conference 1901* record the report of the *Committee on Open-Air Preaching* and the discussion of the resolution which passed overwhelmingly. The very lengthy resolution was summed up by Thomas Bowman Stephenson's motion: "That it is desirable that arrangements for regular open-air work shall be made in every circuit, and, as far as possible, in every place in the circuit."³¹ Stephenson's prominence in the proceedings leading up to the adoption of the traditionally revivalist method of open-air preaching, is notable in light of his role as the founder of the Wesley Deaconess Order.

Wesleyan Methodism quickly became enamored with a resurgence of the once undesirable custom of open-air preaching. However, Wesleyan Methodists felt a need to maintain distinctions between their practice of open-air preaching and the earlier Primitive Methodist practice of camp meetings in order to protect their growing middle class respectability. Unlike the Primitive Methodists, the Wesleyan Methodists discouraged the use of testimonies in open-air services in favor of sermons. "The sermons should be a sermon, and not a mere testimony."³² Josiah Nix, a prominent Methodist evangelistic preacher of the day went beyond this distinction to focus on the importance of preaching to Wesleyan Methodists. "The Conference would be well advised to appoint an expert to train our students in the College [for open-air preaching]."³³ Thus, Wesleyan Methodism perceived the value and effectiveness of open-air preaching as a pertinent revivalist practice, but maintained its fixation with 'respectability' which it continued to pursue in the guise of concern for sermon structure and theological training.

III

In order to ground the discussion regarding the presence of revivalism in the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelists' ministry, a broader understanding of that ministry is necessary. The following provides a descriptive analysis of the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelists' ministry addressing first the dual purpose of that ministry. The Wesley Deaconess-Evangelists' ministry included the nurture not only of souls, typical of the camp meeting and revivalist set-

prominent nineteenth century Primitive Methodist historians, to defend the practice of camp meetings in one of his texts. H. B. Kendall, *History of the Primitive Methodist Church* (London: Joseph Johnson, Primitive Methodist Publishing House, 1919), 15. "Minutes of Several Conversations," *The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1872 reproduction), 8: 300.

³¹"Proceedings of the Methodist Conference—Open-Air Preaching," *The Methodist Recorder* (August 1, 1901), 734.

³²C. R. "Open-Air Preaching," *The Methodist Recorder* (May 16, 1901), 474.

³³Denis Crank, "Josiah Nix on Open-Air Preaching," *The Methodist Recorder* (May 30, 1907), 540.

tings, but also the care of bodies and physical needs. Within the context of this two dimensional ministry the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelists wove together undercurrents of revivalism with their evangelistic work.

The ministry of the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist embodied the three categories of service that summarize the work of all Wesley Deaconesses: visiting, nursing, and evangelistic endeavors. The Deaconess seldom engaged in only one distinct category of work since her ministry typically blended each category according to the needs of a particular context. The ministry assumed by the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist most often related to the organization and leadership of evangelistic missions, but never excluded her participation in visitation or the practice of nursing skills. Despite the variety of the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist's service, her ministry consistently assumed a broad character. The Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist's ministry addressed both the spiritual and physical needs of the people she encountered.

Even in the distinctive context surrounding the evangelistic missions produced by the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelists, these women found opportunities to employ their medical skills. Sister Jeanie Banks makes repeated references to such circumstances in her submissions to the movement's periodical. During several consecutive summers in the late 1890s Sister Banks resided in Scotland providing outreach to the fishermen and to the women working to cure the catches brought in by those fishermen. "At Stornoway my work was much the same as last year, medical and evangelistic."³⁴ Banks described her medical mission work.

My medical work cannot be judged by an onlooker; sometimes I open my room at the appointed hour, and no one comes. Sometimes I am kept employed long after the hour for closing. Still, the people learn to know that I am there, and frequently accidents fresh from the boats, or painful sores are brought to me for attention. Women and girls also come with their terrible finger sores. Cases too bad to be brought to me I attend either in the home, or on the boat, as the case may be.³⁵

Sister Banks' description of her medical work evidences the importance of her efforts with regard to the development of relationships and trust among those to whom she ministered.

During the three months of summer my work has been amongst the North Sea fishermen. Here it has been necessary to have a care for both the bodies and souls of those engaged in this work. Far away from their homes, and continually exposed to danger, these fine fellows often have very sad accidents, and they need a hand to bind and dress their wounds. . . . The women and girls, too, who come in hundreds to work at the fish, get very bad sores upon their hands, and sometimes it has not been one finger only, but five or six that have needed dressing. . . . Every day I set certain hours apart, night and morning, for this work. In this way

³⁴Sister Jeanie Banks, "Mission on the Fishing Grounds," *Highways and Hedges* (October 1898), 234.

³⁵Banks, 234.

many an opportunity has been afforded for dropping a word for the Master, and seeking to point the soul to the Great Physician.³⁶

The two-fold nature of the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist's ministry is demonstrated by Sister Jeanie Banks' daily provision of medical care for those with whom she resided during a season, in this case Scottish fishermen and their families. Whether in Scotland for the summer, or in a village for one to two weeks conducting an evangelistic Mission, the ministry of the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist embodied attention to both temporal and spiritual needs of persons. The unique gift of the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist was the ability to weave together her care for bodies and souls so that her compassion for individuals within their particular circumstances was practiced with relevance and sincerity. Sister Jeanie Banks shared the following comments addressed to her by a fisherman she nursed. The fishermen's remarks illustrate the significance of the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist's holistic ministry to those she served.

"I call you the Good Samaritan," said one who was watching me dress a crushed finger. It was his turn next; and as I bandaged the wounds made by the friction of the heavy sea boots, he said, with lips tremulous with feeling, "I shall tell my good mistress, when I get home, about the lady 'as bandaged my sores.' She could na a' dan 'em half so weel. That's what I call preiching t' Gospel."³⁷

Although Sister Jeanie Banks and others inevitably heard echoes of dissension in their role as Wesley Deaconess-Evangelists leading Mission services across the country, support and acceptance were overwhelmingly expressed in response to their efforts by their recipients. The conclusion of a letter from a participant in one of Sister Jeanie Banks' Missions is typical of this support: "We thank and praise God for Sister's visit, and pray that you may have many such workers. The Church and the world need them."³⁸ No significant controversy was generated regarding the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelists during Sister Jeanie Banks' career. As early as 1890 in Stephenson's text, *Concerning Sisterhoods*, written as an explanation and defense for the Wesley Deaconess Order, Stephenson expressed his opinion that Wesley Deaconesses' work in villages would prove effective and could include preaching if necessary: "She need not preach—probably had better not—though if necessity did occur even that, or something equivalent, might possibly be done."³⁹ There existed no open opposition to the preaching per-

³⁶Sister Jeanie Banks, "A Year's Evangelism," *Highways and Hedges* (November 1897), 258–9.

³⁷Banks, 259.

³⁸*Highways and Hedges* 124 (April 1898), 88.

³⁹Thomas Bowman Stephenson, *Concerning Sisterhoods* (London: The Children's Home, 1890), 75–76. The Wesleyan Methodist Conference of 1803 disallowed the local preaching of women based on the reasoning that a vast majority of Wesleyan Methodists were opposed to it and moreover there was no need of their preaching since there existed at that time an adequate number of male preachers. Flexibility to this ruling lingered with the phrases concerning women preaching to their own sex, which were later omitted but did eventually allow for excep-

formed by the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelists. However, defensiveness was often characteristic of many explanations and descriptions of their work.

There is no special emphasis put on training for speech making or preaching. Deaconesses as a rule are not required as preachers, but for visiting, nursing, dealing with men in classes, or with girls or mothers. A certain amount of talking, of course, they all have to do. But it is just talking as class leaders and Bible class teachers require. Now and then a Deaconess develops a great gift of speech and if so it is thankfully received. Sister Jeanie Banks, for instance, who is a niece of Reverend John Shaw Banks is a most competent missionary. It is said that her gift of speaking in some respects resembles her uncle. She reasons quietly with the people and has great power in persuading them to repent.⁴⁰

The writer of this article skillfully mentioned Sister Jeanie Banks' relation to the highly respected Reverend Doctor John Shaw Banks, thereby continuing the apologetic theme.

Sister Jeanie Banks' work as a Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist was described and related to revivalism in another *Methodist Recorder* article that reported on the Wesley Deaconess Annual Convocation where Banks participated in leading an afternoon session.

Sister Jeanie Banks is a mission preacher who may rank with the Connexional Evangelists. She told a wonderful story of real old-fashioned revival services. The address, like the whole meeting, of which it was the crown, was at once interesting and profoundly spiritual.⁴¹

The theme of revivalism in the ministry of Wesley Deaconess-Evangelists continued in another statement also demonstrating defense of their work. In January 1905, the movement's journal contained an explanation that many of the Wesley Deaconesses were competent speakers, and a few preached with power and success, but they were not an order of women preachers: "Yet when the Spirit of God touches with fire a woman's lips, we dare not bid her be silent. Two of our number [Sisters Jeanie Banks and Helen Fieldson] are wholly devoted to mission preaching."⁴² The ministry of the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelists described by one of their colleagues with the phrase "when the Spirit of God touches with fire a woman's lips," embodies a strong revivalist theme.

Alongside the pervasive revivalism in the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelists' ministry, the women in this role also maintained a degree of respectability with regard to their Victorian womanliness. An article

tional situations for a woman to preach in the presence of a consenting gathering in 1910 and 1911 respectively, according to Deborah Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 92; Dorothy Graham, *Chosen By God* (University of Birmingham: unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 1986), chapter 3.

⁴⁰R.T.K. "The Wesley Deaconess," *The Methodist Recorder* (March 25, 1897), 218.

⁴¹"Methodist May Meetings," *The Methodist Recorder* (April 29, 1897), 298.

⁴²"Our Deaconess-Evangelists," *Flying Leaves* 38 (January 1905), 189.

describing Sister Fieldson's recent leadership of a Mission began with the following statement.

It seemed at first strange to many of our people that a lady should undertake this particular sort of work, and indeed there are only two amongst the hundred and sixty Deaconesses belonging to the Institute who thus conduct evangelistic services. . . . But we think that few, if any, of those who heard Sister Helen will venture to deny her call to preach the gospel. If anybody came expecting sensational or hysterical services they must have been strangely disappointed. There was in her such gentle modesty combined with quiet dignity; such utter selflessness, such an evident surrender of herself to be (as she phrased it), simply the channel through which God's message came, that prejudices were forgotten; and we felt ourselves lifted to a higher plane, and realized the direct influence of the Holy Spirit.⁴³

Inherent in this apologetic description of Sister Helen Fieldson's preaching is a propensity for the ideals of Victorian femininity. The particularly appropriate characteristics for Victorian women to possess mentioned in the above statement include: gentleness, modesty, quiet dignity, selflessness, surrender and sacrifice. According to this article, these traits contributed greatly to the credibility of her work.

Another article submitted to the Wesley Deaconesses' periodical, *Flying Leaves*, provides helpful advice regarding the practicalities of public speaking. Guidance is given regarding pronunciation, volume, as well as the method of organizing the message with a good introduction and conclusion with no digressions. A notable addition to this list of practical fundamentals is for the speaker to, "Be womanly."⁴⁴ It seems that defense for the public speaking of Wesley Deaconesses and Deaconess-Evangelists was derived from the speaker's ability to maintain her 'womanliness' in the midst of a traditionally masculine role. Also important to the acceptance of these women as evangelistic preachers was their ability to avoid "sensational or hysterical services." In addition to maintaining the Victorian ideal of femininity and womanliness, the achievement of middle-class respectability expected of Wesleyan Methodists was also required of Wesley Deaconesses. Therefore the ability of these women to conform to these reputable and appropriate expectations, absent of sensation and hysterics unlike their female colleagues in other traditions of Methodism, earned them a cautious respect as preachers.

Among British Methodists, the Wesleyan Methodists were the least open to women participating in evangelistic ministries related to revivalism because of their obsession with maintaining middle class respectability. Women set apart to full-time evangelistic ministries combined with the women's sympathy for undercurrents of revivalism were subversive entities within late 19th and early 20th century British Wesleyan Methodism. The convergence of a number of advantageous circumstances accounts for the

⁴³"Our Deaconess Evangelists and Their Work," *Flying Leaves* 75 (February 1908), 204.

⁴⁴"Hints on Public Speaking," *Flying Leaves* 56 (June 1906), 95.

presence of the few women in such roles as the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist. As a prominent Wesleyan Methodist clergyman, Thomas Bowman Stephenson, the founder of the Wesley Deaconess Order, remained open to the effectiveness of revivalism with regard to ministry with the working classes. Although a source of controversy within Wesleyan Methodism, revivalism was never squelched, particularly in rural areas. Stephenson capitalized on Wesleyan Methodism's eagerness to address the physical and spiritual needs of the working classes in the context of the Progressive Era and the Forward Movement. Stephenson's pioneering vision to encourage women in evangelistic ministry coupled with Sister Jeanie Banks' strategic heritage and these women's ability to maintain their "Victorian womanliness" created a uniquely friendly atmosphere for the work of the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelist. Within this context of converging circumstances the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelists embodied within their ministry themes of revivalism in the spirit of early and middle nineteenth century Primitive Methodism. Through their Mission services that complemented and nurtured undercurrents of revivalism in late 19th and early 20th century Wesleyan Methodism, the Wesley Deaconess-Evangelists reached many of the rural working classes with their respectable revivalism.