

Exodus to Romans: Women in the Church
(Exodus 15:19-21 and Romans 16:1-16)

There was a time in US history when women and children were classified as chattel, legally non-persons. There was little to no service for women because of prejudices and limitations of attitudes in both society and the church. In spite of those attitudes, in 1869, 2 missionaries' wives were home from India. They were speaking to a group of six women about the desperate spiritual and physical needs of women in India. No male doctor was allowed to treat women, schooling was non-existent- they needed single, trained, and dedicated women for medical and educational work. From that group of six women, who recognized the need to help others formed the Women's Foreign Missionary Society (WFMS).

Now fast forward to May 11, 1880 to the home of Mrs. W. H. Holmes in Turner Junction and the birth of our own Women's Foreign Missionary Society. I wonder if those women who we are unable to recall most of their names realized the legacy they were starting of supporting missions here and abroad, Christian fellowship, and support to the church. What they started that day we are celebrating a 130 years later.

The role of women in the church is biblical and spans two thousand years of scripture from the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament to the New Testament.

In our Old Testament reading this morning, Moses has just brought the Israelites out of Egypt, liberating them as slaves of Pharaoh. Miriam is leading

the women in songs of victory and dancing to God for his delivering the Israelites out of the heavy hand of the Pharaoh's taskmasters. God had just closed up the Red sea behind the Israelites as they crossed over on to dry ground. The women were the first ones to go against the Pharaoh with the midwives saving the Hebrew baby boys which they had been ordered to kill. The women recognized that God had blessed them.

The Bible is rich with named and unnamed women who were strong and loved God and later Christ with all their heart. In the New Testament reading this morning, Paul is writing to the church in Rome. Toward the end of his letter, he recognizes the activities of women in the early church. The ancient Christian churches did not exist like we know of today's churches but met in homes. These homes being the domain of the woman allowed for them to play key roles in early Christianity. Paul provides us with clues to the many activities the women were engaged. He calls out to greet Prisca, Junia, Julia, and Nereus' sister who all had worked and traveled as missionaries in pairs with their husbands or brothers. Prisca and her husband had risked their lives to save Paul's. Junica was a prominent apostle who had been imprisoned for her work. Mary and Persis are recognized for their hard work. Phoebe in the first verse is recognized as a deacon. These women were all

somebody's mothers, wives, sisters just as they were 130 years ago and now. Let's take a look at the legacy or mark of these Old and New Testament women have made on our own church right here in West Chicago.

In the first year of Women's Foreign Missionary Society here in West Chicago, the women began their first year (1880) with a reported income of 59.04 and an expense of \$0.86 bringing them a balance of 58.18. That is incredible because it was raised by one penny at a time. In today's market that would be like us raising \$5500.00.

Slide 48,49

1893 the Ladies Aid Society started in West Chicago. They met on Thursdays to quilt, sew and raise money for the church budget. They averaged 30 quilts a year.

(Slide 50)

The year 1933, they raised \$500 for the 100th anniversary of the church, paid for the reroofing of the parsonage as well as painting and extensive repairs inside and money towards the note, to the church budget, and the memorial pipe organ fund.

(go thru 51-53)

The ladies guild started in 1903 Delta Alpha, 1929 Philathera Circle and the Wesleyan Service Guild is organized for women employed outside the home.

(54, 55)

Many ways were used by the women in the organizations to raise money. One way, the Ladies Aid Society was to make donuts from scratch, fry them, bagged them by the

dozen and then sell them for 10 cents. Some of the stores in the downtown area sold them. Their biggest day was 255 dozen. 255 Dozen for a dime a piece. Some the women involved in this project was Gladys Lester, Mabel Day, Elsie Hoag, and Ethel Woodward. The other famous project was peanut day. This was two days of work. The women bought peanuts in the shell by the 100 pounds. One day to shell them, the other day to fry them and bag them. The recipe for the donuts is in the West Chicago Historical museums cookbook. They served many church dinners, collected dues, and monies for attending meetings and lunches.

(56)

In 1940 the Women's Foreign Missionary Society became the Women's Society of Christian Service. Over the years different circles were started-Mary, Martha, Priscilla, Rebecca, Elizabeth.

(57,58)

1974 saw the change of Women's society Christian Service to United Methodist Women and then to our own UMCW.

This series of slides is a year in the life of UMW and UMCW. WE raise money many ways (59,60) one is the pecan pie baking on Good Friday. Usually everyone gets a task- Eileen's is quality control (61) yes Eileen that is a pie crust. (Go thru 62-64) It takes many hands to make pies (65)

(66,67)

Over the years all these women were constantly raising money for the kitchen. Around 1933, "a fine new gas range and plate were added to the

kitchen. Between 1947-49 The Women's Society of Christian service raised over 2000.00 for a complete kitchen remodeling- 2 range units, stainless steel sinks and drainboards, hot water heater, tile, and all the labor. The kitchen is the life blood for our many groups. It is what we are known for food

WE have kitchen clean up and out days, we work hard to clean and organize. (68) This may be from inhaling to much cleaning fumes.

(69,70)

Throwing the cluster luncheon was added to our plate thru the years.(71) Our speaker one year was Mrs. Wesley or as we know her are very own Karen.

(go thru 72-82)

Sometimes we like to throw showers. This one was for our new kitchen. We brought gifts and everyone got to open one but not theirs.(83) Plus we even get a chance to throw a Church Ladies Rummage Sale Shower.

(Slides 84-95)

One of the highlights of the years is our salad lunch and woman of the year. Many great women have been honored. I am always surprised how excited we get over food. Of course fun is had by all and the surprise look on the faces of the winners is all worth it.

(96,97)

The other summer activity is the annual rummage sale. (98) But some have more fun then others.(99) By the

end of Friday night we are beat but we still have another day.

(go thru 100-111)

Lions club lunches have become a main stay of our fund raising. We added doing the Christmas lunches which takes several people to put on. In 1974 profits from lions lunches was \$667 a year and today we make \$3500 a year. We have two very special men that have provided their valuable services- Howard and Mel and Paul joins when he can.

The biggest venture is our bazaar) It takes several hours to make items, bake, get the lunch ready.(112,113) The making of the baskets take team work.(114,115,116) The soup jars is an assembly line with each person having a item to add to the jar.

(go thru 117-126)

Then the bazaar itself. The hours of setting up the crafts, the bake goods, getting lunch ready, and tables set for a one day event.

This is just a small look at what we do. (127, 128)This community of women support many missions both here and aboard, are always willing to help our neighbors, support the church. (129) We are not all angels or look like but our differences is what makes us-us.

(130)

Woman was made from the rib of Adam but we have always been the backbone of the church. For all the named and nameless women who sang and danced before God , who were strong, celebrated Christ with all their

heart , who made the world a better place we are thankful-thankful that from Exodus to Romans women have always

played a vital role in building the church we have come to know today. Amen.