

**A SERVICE OF WORSHIP CELEBRATING  
THE 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF FULL CLERGY RIGHTS FOR WOMEN  
[Granted in the former Methodist Church in 1956]**

**NOTES**

THEME

The theme for this worship expands our understanding of the granting of full rights for women. It celebrates and recognizes that the former Methodist Church, currently The United Methodist Church, acted with courage at a particular time in history (1956). The service is to celebrate, repent, give thanks, and look to the future to the ways in which the granting of full rights for women expands our understanding of God's vision. This is not just about women; it is about being the church. How does the church continue to hear the call of God's full inclusion in the same way that brought women to the full leadership in Christ's vocation?

The **theme** of the worship is taken from the Hebrew Scriptures, Habakkuk 2:1-4. We recommend using the NRSV, but the service will refer also to Eugene Peterson's *The Message* since the words offer a translation that elaborates the theme.

This worship service was created by a design team of United Methodist clergywomen: Bishop Sally Dyck (Minnesota Conference), the Rev. Elizabeth Lopez (Minnesota Conference), the Rev. M. Lynn Scott (Wisconsin Conference).

NOTES – Worship Service

The worship service is a one-hour service that may be **adapted** for various possibilities within an annual conference, such as a clergy session, a 20-minute worship/devotional, a portion of a Celebration Night, and so on.

The following are integral to the worship service:

- The first movement of “asking the questions” has to do with the preparation of the church and culture for the full rights of women. We need to celebrate those who took the bold steps.
- The second movement of “living the vision” centers on the fifty years of witnesses from 1956 to 2006.
- The third movement of “scanning the horizon” centers on looking ahead to see how the UMC can continue to listen to the vision of God and serve the needs of the world.
- The language in the service is inclusive as a way to recognize the full inclusion of women into the ordination and full membership in the church. This worship service will not hold integrity without inclusive language for humankind and for images of God.
- The service begins with a clergywomen procession that can be very visual and celebrative and can also occur before or during the opening hymn.
- Each annual conference is invited to research its own history and incorporate it into the timelines and the storytelling. (See notes of invitation to annual conferences.)
- The service celebrates full clergy rights, and it is recommended that the women who have lived this history do the storytelling. Women who are local pastors, associate members, deacons, and diaconal ministers are welcome to participate in the leading of the liturgy and in the procession as a way to celebrate all women in professional ministry.

- The piece titled “The Cloud of Witnesses Ask the Questions” is attached at the end of the worship service. The piece runs about fifteen minutes and needs a variety of male and female voices so that it can be read dramatically – as if you were sitting at a General Conference. The names of the people need to be stated, as that is the form of speaking on the floor of the General Conference.
- Place a timeline on the back of the bulletin so that the congregation can view the longer history of women in ministry throughout our predecessor denominations. This is also a way to understand that our history is longer than fifty years.
- Remember that when the Evangelical United Brethren Church (EUB) and The Methodist Church merged in 1968, the EUB already had approved full rights for women; so we were living the vision together.
- A clergywomen’s choir (licensed, consecrated, commissioned, ordained women) would be a wonderful asset to this service. Choose music that would be consistent with the theme.
- Resources and pictures are available from the General Commission on Archives and History of The United Methodist Church

#### NOTES to the Annual Conferences

The worship service is a one-hour service that may be **adapted** for various possibilities within an annual conference, such as a clergy session, a twenty-minute worship/devotional, a portion of a Celebration Night, and so on.

Each annual conference forms its agenda and worship in different ways. This worship is adaptable to various formats. If you choose to alter the service, please note the flow of the worship through Habakkuk 2, along with the essential elements of celebration, remembrance, confession, and future possibilities.

## Music Notes

The hymnals used in this worship service are designated:

UMH – *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 1988

TFWS – *The Faith We Sing*

SOZ – *Songs of Zion*

There are songs that have been written by and for United Methodist clergywomen and by ordained women in other denominations. We highly encourage the use of these hymns as a way to celebrate the gifts that women bring to the ministry. The following information will be helpful in securing the rights to this music.

### God of Days and Years and Eons

Huber, Jane Parker. *Singing in Celebration: Hymns for Special Occasions*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996 (page 44). Tune: HYMN TO JOY.

For permissions, contact: Westminster John Knox Press, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, Kentucky 40202-1396.

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### Gather the Cloud of Witnesses

Words and music by the Rev. Susan Beehler, a United Methodist clergywoman from the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference, currently living in Texas. Address: The Rev. Susan Beehler, 8103 La Paloma, El Paso, TX 79907 (915-859-5689 – home)

### A Living Faith

Duck, Ruth C. and Bausch, Michael. *Everflowing Streams: Songs for Worship*. New York, NY: The Pilgrim Press, 1981. (p. 55)

Ruth C. Duck, a United Church of Christ clergywoman is on the faculty at the United Methodist seminary of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, IL

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# Worship Service

## GATHERING MUSIC

### PROCESSIONAL

*Clergywomen (licensed, ordained, commissioned)*

### CALL TO WORSHIP

**L:** “And then God answered: ‘Write this. Write what you see. Write it out in big block letters so that it can be read on the run. This vision-message is a witness pointing to what’s coming. It aches for the coming – it can hardly wait! And it doesn’t lie. If it seems slow in coming, wait. It’s on its way. It will come right on time’” (*Habakkuk 2:2-3, The Message*<sup>1</sup>). We come to worship as The United Methodist Church who saw the vision-message fifty years ago, pointing to the full ministry of women in the church.

**P:** **We come to celebrate our forbearers who faithfully responded to God’s vision-message to ordain women, freeing all humanity’s gifts to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.**

**L:** We also come to repent for the ways in which women who offered themselves for ordained ministry have been silenced and not fully accepted.

**P:** **We come to listen to the witnesses who dared to write God’s word in big block letters through their own lives and ministry so that the world could “read on the run” that the Holy Spirit and the ministry of the church includes all people.**

**L:** We come to be sent forth as witnesses into the world, wherever it is still aching for the church’s prophetic action.

### OPENING HYMN

*The following hymns are possibilities:*

*“The Summons”*

*The Faith We Sing, #2130*

*“We Are Singing in the Light of God”*

*The Faith We Sing, #2235*

*“You are the Seed”*

*United Methodist Hymnal, #583*

*“Gather Us In”*

*The Faith We Sing, #2236*

*“A Living Faith”*

*Ruth C Duck (see Music Notes)*

*(Tune is “Faith of our Fathers,” but the verses sing of the faith of our fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters.)*

### Asking the Questions

*“What’s God going to say to my questions?*

*I’m braced for the worst. I’ll climb to the lookout tower and scan the horizon.*

*I’ll wait to see what God says,*

*How God will answer my complaint.”*

*--Habakkuk 2:1 (The Message)<sup>1</sup>*

### SONG

*“Gather the Cloud of Witnesses” (Susan Beehler)*

*(A song written by a United Methodist clergywoman that calls us to remember those who have gone before us – to gather them in. An appropriate choir anthem to introduce this section, though possible, would be more difficult as a congregational hymn.)*

## THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES ASKS THE QUESTIONS

*(This could be done in a “readers’ theatre” format with different men’s and women’s voices coming from microphones on the stage area or around the room. The litany is NOT printed in the bulletin. See the attachment at the end of the worship service for the complete script.)*

## CONFESSION

*(When speaking of “The United Methodist Church,” we are indicating all the predecessor denominations)*

L: The prophetic voices of women in the church have been present throughout the centuries. Our biblical and church histories are witnesses to this. Although they were voices of transformation for the sake of the world, they were silenced when they asked for the blessing, acceptance, and granting of full clergy rights.

**P: We of The United Methodist Church participated in that silencing and non-acceptance, but God broke through and gave The United Methodist Church a vision – a vision-making message pointing to the full rights for the ministry of ordained women in the church.**

L: Fifty years ago on the floor of the 1956 General Conference, courageous men stood with empowered voices and said: “. . .it seems to me if we give {women} the full rights of belonging to the conference, that we will be making it possible for many more women who have the ability and the training and all the qualifications, to respond to our need. Therefore, I believe that we should open the way.” *(Lance Webb, Ohio)*

**P: And God broke through the resistance and empowered The United Methodist Church to live out its vision-making message for full clergy rights of women.**

L: As The United Methodist Church, we repent for the times we have hindered the full clergy rights of women.

**P: Forgive us, O God, and empower us with your vision.**

L: We repent for the times we have failed to stand together in solidarity with our sisters as they have sought full clergy rights.

**P: Forgive us, O God, and empower us with your vision.**

L: We repent for not having women’s voices around the cabinet table.

**P: Forgive us, O God, and empower us with your vision.**

L: We repent for not supporting the number of women who have exited ministry due to lack of acceptance and supportive appointments.

**P: Forgive us, O God, and empower us with your vision.**

*(Annual Conference: Insert other prayers of repentance that specifically speak to your annual conference. Close each one with the response: “Forgive us, O God, and empower us with your vision.”)*

*AC – Add not only stats, but also environment: sexism, harassment, isolation, etc.*

**P: Forgive us, O God, and empower us with your vision.**

L: As we celebrate 50 years of women who have persisted, fought the good fight, believed in God’s vision-making message of full clergy rights for women, read the “big block letters” and have continued to run with the vision, we give God thanks for these women who continue to transform The United Methodist Church and the world.

**P: As we gather today, God, send us forth as witnesses into the world, wherever it is still aching for the church’s prophetic action.**

## Writing the Vision

*And then God answered, 'Write this.*

*Write what you see.*

*Write it out in big block letters*

*So that it can be read on the run.'"*

*--Habakkuk 2:2-3 (The Message)*

## **WITNESSING**

*Different people speak for about 2-3 minutes each; these are brief vignettes and not full stories. They should be in manuscript form and should speak to the experience of clergywomen in these past years – the struggles, the acceptance, the experiences that indicate that, through our lives, God is “writing the vision”; and through our living, the vision can be “read on the run.”*

- *First or oldest clergywomen (full rights, elder) in the annual conference*
- *A current woman seminarian*
- *A young woman who has recognized a call to ministry in the UMC (maybe a candidate?)*
- *One or two men who have been called to ministry through the impact of a clergywoman*
- *(Annual Conference – a 5-minute PowerPoint with pictures, quotes, etc., of the clergywomen in your annual conference would enhance this time of witnessing. Be creative.)*

## **LITANY OF THANKSGIVING**

*(During this litany of thanksgiving, either of the following songs could be sung at the beginning and the end – or could be incorporated throughout the litany:*

*TFWS #2081 – Thank You, Jesus {use different languages}*

*TFWS #2267 - Taste and See)*

**L:** We give thanks and celebrate the group of men and women at the 1956 General Conference who lived with courage and voted affirmatively on the full rights of women in light of the opposition of church and culture.

**P: We give thanks to those who lived the radical vision of God.**

**L:** We give thanks to the many units of Women’s Society of Christian Service, the countless laywomen, who wrote petitions that brought the 1956 General Conference to this historical moment.

**P: We give thanks to those who lived the radical vision of God.**

**L:** We give thanks to the groups of people who pressed hard and lived on the margins, waiting to see the justice and inclusion of women in the church for the sake of the world.

**P: We give thanks to those who lived the radical vision of God.**

**L:** We give thanks for the early women who risked answering the call to local church ministry, especially the twenty-seven women who were ordained and given full rights in the annual conference sessions of 1956.

**P: We give thanks to those who lived the radical vision of God.**

*(Annual Conferences – Make this specific to your annual conference, giving thanks for those bodies in your midst who were willing to live into this radical vision. This might mean naming churches who first received women, the first clergywoman with full rights, the first woman district superintendent, the first woman bishop to serve in your conference, etc. After each prayer, respond with “We give thanks to those who lived the radical vision of God.”)*

L: We give thanks and celebrate the church for doing the right thing in spite of the questions. We give thanks for The United Methodist Church that continues to take steps of courage to seek justice.

**P: Empower your United Methodist Church to continue to live out God’s vision.**

**MIDDLE HYMN**

*The following hymns are possibilities:*

<i>“All is Well”</i>	<i>Songs of Zion, #5</i>
<i>“Gather the Cloud of Witnesses”</i> <i>(Written by and for United Methodist clergywomen)</i>	<i>Susan Beehler (see Music Notes)</i>
<i>“We Are Called”</i>	<i>The Faith We Sing, #2172</i>
<i>“You are the Seed”</i>	<i>United Methodist Hymnal, #583</i>
<i>“Forward Through the Ages”</i>	<i>United Methodist Hymnal, #555</i>

**Scanning the Horizon**

*“I’ll climb to the lookout tower and scan the horizon. . .”*  
*“This vision-message is a witness*  
*pointing to what’s coming.*  
*It aches for the coming – it can hardly wait!*  
*And it doesn’t lie.*  
*If it seems slow in coming, wait.*  
*It’s on its way. It will come right on time.”*  
*--Habakkuk 2:4 (The Message<sup>1</sup>)*

**LITURGICAL DANCE**

*(The service tries to incorporate the written word, multimedia and movement. This would be opportunity for a soloist or a group of dancers to interpret this Scripture that invites us to “ask the questions,” to “write the vision,” and to be the “vision-message” in our world today.)*

**BENEDICTION**

L: Ethelou Talbert, in 1979, said,  
“Recently I took time to look at myself. These are some of the questions I asked:  
‘Who am I? Where am I? What am I doing for myself and the good of humankind?  
Where do I hope to go?’  
Only you can answer these questions for you. Only I can answer these questions for me.  
The now is today. We must live it to its fullest. We must do what we really want and  
need to do. The possibilities of today are ours.... Stop, take an inventory of your life. Are  
you heading in the direction you want to go? Are you who you want to be?”<sup>2</sup>

**P: “What’s God going to say to my questions? I’ll climb to the lookout tower and scan the horizon.”**

L: Where is the world still aching for The United Methodist Church to make plain the vision?

**P: Will we “write this” and put it in “big block letters” and “run with it?”**

L: “If it seems slow in coming, wait. It’s on its way. It will come right on time.” As it has done in the past, so God will see the vision come to reality through us.

**P: We are vision-messages to this generation and the next. What we do here matters.**

**ALL: Bless us, O God, to live your radical vision-message today!**

## **CLOSING HYMN**

*The following hymns are possibilities:*

*“The Summons”*

*The Faith We Sing, #2130*

*“Here I Am, Lord”*

*United Methodist Hymnal, #593*

*“In the Midst of New Dimensions”*

*The Faith We Sing, #2238*

*“God of Days and Years and Eons”*

*Jane Parker Huber (see Music notes)*

*(Sings of the God of the past, present, and future, of men and women, young and aging, and of the “faith to trust and follow.”)*

- 1 Scripture taken from *THE MESSAGE*. Copyright ©1993,1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved.
- 2 *Spirituality & Social Responsibility: Vocational Vision of Women in the United Methodist Tradition*, Rosemary Skinner Keller, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 287. Used with permission of Abingdon Press/Cokesbury.

## THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES ASKS THE QUESTIONS

*(This script is to be used in a dramatic Readers' Theatre style in the service of worship celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Full Clergy Rights for Women in The Methodist Church and predecessor denominations.)*

Narrator: Women were serving as lay pastors and local elders prior to 1956. Being a local elder allowed women to serve as pastors, yet not have membership in the annual conference. Without this membership, without full clergy rights, women were not guaranteed an appointment and could not vote on clergy matters of the annual conference.

The 1956 General Conference asked the question, "Should The Methodist Church grant full clergy rights to women?"

In every age, the church is challenged to listen deeply to God's vision and to live it fully. In the May 7<sup>th</sup> session of the 1956 General Conference many questions were raised:

"Would it be possible to appoint women to local churches if full rights are granted?"

"Can we agree to something in principle, yet not live it out in practical ways?"

"Should full rights be given to single women and not to married women due to household responsibilities?"

"Is the responsibility regarding an appointment of a woman that of the bishop and cabinet or of the local church's acceptance of a woman?"

and "Does the gospel speak to us on this matter?"

Listen. . . listen to some voices of the 1956 General Conference. And let's ask ourselves, "How do we hear God's vision today and act on it with courage and trust?"

Male Voice: Marvin Stuart, California-Nevada Conference " . . . we were up against two decisions; one, is this right as a matter of principle, the matter of full clergy rights for women. I think that almost, if not all, were persuaded that in principle we could not object to it. The question then . . . was this, are the difficulties, the practical difficulties in the way of this principle insurmountable?"

(p. 521, May 7, 1956, *Daily Christian Advocate*)

Male Voice: Dewey Muir, Illinois Conference. "The ability to preach and to give leadership in the church is not in any sense determined by sex. This is acknowledged. That some women have done excellent and outstanding work and service, is recognized. Ability to preach, to give leadership, have little to do with the real issue of granting full ministerial rights to women. . . .

"It is the judgment of the ministerial members of the Committee on the Ministry that such request as has come before the General Conference is based upon a general theory that basically no privilege should be granted one sex which is denied to the other. In that noble sentiment we share. However, we are facing the realistic problems of administration of the law of the church. . . .

“Under our appointive system, every ministerial member of an annual conference must be appointed to a pastoral charge or some special appointment of the Conference, whether there is a charge that wants that minister or not. I am keenly away of the problems involved in appointing some men to churches, yet no church has said, ‘No, we just do not want a man preacher.’ (*laughter*) Yet in trying to appoint even good women ministers. . . it is not uncommon for the answer to be, ‘We just do not want a woman minister.’

“Practically, until those demanding such legislation are committed not only to legislation but to the receiving of women traveling preachers, not in general but in particular as pastors of their own particular charges, we are of the opinion that our present legislation which does provide for ordination of women. . . is best for our particular church.” (p. 522, May 7, 1956, *Daily Christian Advocate*)

Male Voice: Allen B. Rice, Northwest Indiana Conference. “I am a district superintendent. . . I am against discrimination, any kind of discrimination, and particularly that which throws in the lap of the cabinet the solution of such a ticklish and difficult problem as would be involved in the matter of deciding on their part whether or not a woman in such a position was or was not capable of being appointed.

“I think that is the kind of difficult spot to put the cabinet of any Conference in without the action of the Conference in particular.” (p. 523)

Male Voice: Henry Lyle Lambdin, Newark Conference. “The tendency in the discussion of the question concerning the admission of women into full conference membership tends to drift always to the administrative level. The arguments seem to center around the perplexity of the district superintendent who is trying to promote the Reverend Jane Doe, let us say, from Hardscrabble Circuit to the First Church of Licksillet.

“Pity the poor district superintendent, is the sum and substance of most of the arguments that have been presented.

“. . . is this conference prepared to say in the year of our Lord 1956 that no woman, however well qualified educationally, whatever demonstration she has given of gifts and grace and loveliness, no woman shall be called to God, to spiritual leadership within that part of the organizational structure of The Methodist Church that we call the Annual Conference?

“Are we prepared to say that no woman regardless of her qualification is not fit to be a member of an Annual Conference? That is the question before us.” (p. 524)

Male Voice: Joe E. Bowers, Oklahoma Conference. “A good deal of talk has been made about the predicament of the district superintendent in this matter. He is not the one who is on the spot at all. Actually it is the local church. I think it should be made perfectly clear here, . . . that if we support this we should support it with the understanding that it means the local church is willing to accept the appointment of a lady as a minister.” (p. 526)

Male Voice: Everett W. Palmer, Southern California-Arizona Conference. “We need to do this thing and we will have to do it some day. Why not do it now and do it graciously?” (p. 526)

Male Voice: Marvin L. Boyd, Northwest Texas Conference. “In all of these matters we have talked in terms of a principle and then of implementing that principle. It seems to me that when we permit women to be admitted in Annual Conferences anywhere we approve the principle of clergy rights for women.

“The chief problem is not a problem of principle but a problem of obstacles which seem to many of us in some places to be almost insurmountable.” (p. 530)

Narrator: At one point in the session, a proposal was suggested that single women and widows be granted full clergy rights, while married women would not have the same privileges.

Male Voice: Dewey Muir, Illinois Conference. “. . . it proposes that admission to Conference membership shall be restricted to unmarried women and widows, and further provides that upon marriage, Conference membership of a traveling woman preacher shall be discontinued.” (p. 522)

Male Voice: C. Anderson Davis, East Tennessee Conference. “In our own Annual Conference of the five women who are preachers, four of them are married women. These four married women have no children, or no home responsibility.

“It seems there are many women who are married who would be more capable of carrying on this ministry than the women who are not married and those who are working.” (p. 525)

Male Voice: Lynn J. Radcliffe, Ohio Conference. “The principle, Mr. Chairman, is a great one. Let us not be confused on this issue. Let us not lose our way in the multiplicity of amendment and parliamentary situation. The principle is, does Jesus Christ treat woman as a child of God, entitled to the same privileges and rights as a man?” (p. 526)

Male Voice: C. Anderson Davis, East Tennessee Conference. “I do not believe, Bishop and members of the Conference, that we should discriminate against any of the women. It is the same type of thing that prevailed when we men were trying to get suffrage, to vote. If we discriminate against our women in this particular thing it does away with the whole principle of women having equal rights in any field.

“Women who go into the field of medicine, into the field of law and similar fields do not crowd it and do not create a problem.

“I do not feel they would create a problem in the ministry. I feel that they would bring much dignity and add much to it. The district superintendents and the bishop have great problems at times placing our men who are in the ministry, and I am sure they would not have any more trouble placing the women. ” [Applause] (p. 525)

Narrator: Although the discussion on this legislation was to last through the morning, by the time of the lunch recess, no decision had been made by the body. The Conference dismissed for lunch, then gathered for the afternoon with the singing of the hymn, "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind." It was later in the conversation that the first woman spoke on the issue. Although speaking against the full rights for women, she did raise some important questions.

Female Voice: Mrs. Henry D. Ebner, New Jersey Conference. "But before we vote on this question, . . . to change our 'Discipline' {we} would have to answer yes to three very important questions, and I submit them in all seriousness.

"First of all, if I voted yes, I would be able to say to my district superintendent, 'Yes, send me a woman pastor.'

"Secondly, the ministers as well as the laymen would have to say, 'I am willing to serve under a woman district superintendent,' for if this goes through, we are not going to discriminate. . . .(Applause)

"Furthermore, bishop, my last question . . . would be this: We are willing to elect a woman bishop. Now, you may think that is rather exaggerated, but, believe me, it is not. You have had reference to the power of womanhood. I leave that to your own thinking." (p. 528)

Narrator: The second woman to speak was in favor of full rights.

Female Voice: Mrs. Edwin S. Anderson, New England Conference. "Women are accepted as candidates for the ministry and are permitted to graduate from seminaries. They are permitted to perform all the services that men ministers perform, and they are required to attend the sessions of annual conference. Each woman minister brings her lay delegate. The lay delegate is permitted to sit within the bower of the church and has the privilege of the floor; but the woman minister has no privileges. . . .

"A woman Conference member is guaranteed an appointment is another one of the objections. But why not for women as well as for men, if they have equal opportunities and equal qualifications? (p. 528)

"The churches which have given full clergy rights to women have been greatly pleased with the results. The Methodist Church has always been able to adapt itself to change and should set an example in granting equal rights and opportunities of service to all its members, regardless of sex" (p. 528).

Narrator: The conversation was drawing to a close.

Male Voice: James S. Chubb, Nebraska Conference. "Mr. Chairman and members of the Conference: We are right now to the crucial issue which all of us recognize, as to how you vote. I suppose the issue is this, whether we are taking the daring or brand new opportunity to secure the type of woman who heretofore thought she could not actively enter the ministry" (p. 529)

Narrator: The presiding bishop, Bishop King, called for the vote by a show of hands. The proposed legislation was passed without a standing vote, without a ballot. Bishop King asked Bishop Springer to offer a benediction.

Male Voice: Bishop Springer: "Shall we look to the Eternal?

"Now, may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord, Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, the blood of the everlasting covenant make you perfect to do his will in all things, working in you and through you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, to whom the glory and majesty both now and forever. Amen" (p. 533).

Narrator: And in a moment of gracious hospitality, the following dialogue was heard.

Male Voice: Lynn H. Corson, New Jersey Conference. "Mr. Chairman, this is a day of particular triumph and significance to one of the members of this group who for many years has been looking forward to this moment when full clergy rights for women would be voted by this General Conference. I refer to Dr. Georgia Harkness. (*Applause*)

"I think that it is a matter only due her as a courtesy from the General Conference to express the appreciation of the Conference for this valiant fight she has waged for this cause for many years and express to her how we know that on this day she must have peculiar satisfaction in the knowledge that this fight has eventuated in final victory for her cause.

"Let us salute Dr. Georgia Harkness." (*The audience arose and applauded.*) [p. 534]

Female Voice: Dr. Georgia Harkness: "I must have a moment to thank you for this very wonderful expression.

"Some of you wondered why I didn't speak this afternoon. It says in the Bible there is a time to speak and a time to be silent. I thought we would do better if we let the rest of you speak. Thank you." (*Applause*) [p. 534]

*Quotes are taken from the Daily Christian Advocate, General Conference, 1956, The Methodist Church. Page numbers are in parentheses. Copies of this section of the Daily Christian Advocate may be obtained from the General Commission on Archives and History ([www.gcqh.org](http://www.gcqh.org)) of The United Methodist Church. Used with permission of General Commission on Archives and History, United Methodist Church, Madison, New Jersey.*

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## **Timeline of women's empowerment in the United Methodist Church and predecessor churches**

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C. 1770 -- First woman is appointed as a class leader in America

1817 -- A woman may exhort and hold prayer meetings but is denied a preaching license

1819 -- Missionary and Bible Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church established with auxiliary New York Female Missionary Society

1841 -- First Methodist periodical for women begins publication

1847 -- A United Brethren Conference (White River) grants a woman (Charity Opheral) commendation to preach and a Local License to Preach in 1849

1851 -- First woman (Lydia Sexton, 1799-1894) to be voted recommendation as a pulpit speaker by the General Conference for The Church of the United Brethren in Christ

1857 -- The General Conference of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ passes a resolution that no woman should be allowed to preach

1866 -- A woman (Helenor M. Davison) is ordained a deacon by the Methodist Protestant Church (Northern Indiana Conference)

1869 -- First woman (Margaret Newton Van Cott, 1830-1914) to be licensed to preach in The Methodist Episcopal Church

1869-98 - Societies for women active in mission created by several Methodist denominations, including: Methodist Episcopal; United Brethren; Methodist Episcopal, South; Methodist Protestant; African Methodist Episcopal Zion; Evangelical Association; and African Methodist Episcopal Zion.

1880 -- Women (Anna Howard Shaw and Anna Oliver) denied ordination by Methodist Episcopal Church. Anna Howard Shaw was ordained in the Methodist Protestant Church (New York Conference)

1884 -- Woman's ordination (Anna Howard Shaw) by Methodist Protestant Church ruled out of order

1889 – General Conference of the United Brethren Church approves licensing and ordination of women. Two women (Ella Niswonger, Maggie Elliott) were granted a license to preach the gospel, and Ella Niswonger was ordained. Woman elder ordained in Methodist Protestant Church.

1892 -- Three lay and one clergy women delegates denied seating at General Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church

1892 -- First women delegates seated at the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church; in 1893, at the General Conference of the United Brethren in Christ Church; in 1904, at the Methodist Episcopal Church (where women were also granted laity rights); and in 1922, at the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

1894 – First woman (Julia A. J. Foote) is ordained deacon in the A.M.E. Zion Church

1896 – Woman (Sarah Dickey) ordained by the Church of the United Brethren in Christ (Miami Annual Conference)

1901 -- First clergywoman delegate seated at the General Conference of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ.

1904 -- Women granted laity rights and admitted to Methodist Episcopal Church General Conference

1910 -- Women's laity rights are denied by the Methodist Episcopal Church South General Conference. Seated in 1922

1920 – Methodist Episcopal Church officially extends to women the local preacher's license, the first step to ordained ministry

1924 -- Methodist Episcopal Church women are given limited clergy rights as 'local' ordination

1939 -- First woman to be named theological professor at a North American Seminary

1944 -- Women's Division of the Board of Missions of Methodist Church forms a Committee on the Status of Women

1946 -- Women denied ordination in the newly organized Evangelical United Brethren Church (merger of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ and the Evangelical Church) – a step backward

1956 – General Conference of the Methodist Church declared that “women are eligible for all orders of the ministry and full conference membership,” thereby granting full clergy rights. Maud Keister Jensen was the first one granted such rights on May 18, when the Central Pennsylvania Conference met. As other conferences met that year, a total of 22 women were ordained.

1967 -- First woman appointed as district superintendent

1968 -- The United Methodist Church is created through union of the former Methodist and Evangelical United Brethren churches. New denomination affirms full clergy rights for women.

1972 -- General Conference of the United Methodist Church creates and funds an action-oriented commission to address the discrimination against women at all levels of the denomination.

1976 -- General Conference establishes the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women as a standing commission.

1976 – Ten women clergy elected delegates to the 1976 General Conference of The United Methodist Church.

1980 -- the North Central Jurisdiction elects The Rev. Marjorie Matthews, the first woman bishop in The United Methodist Church. She is assigned to the Wisconsin Conference.

1984 -- The Western Jurisdiction elects the Rev. Leontine T.C. Kelly, an African American, as the UMC’s first woman of color bishop.

1996 – First woman bishop (Judith Craig) named to deliver the Episcopal Address to the General Conference

2000 -- General Conference reaffirms the need to pursue full participation of all women in the denomination and outlines a vision for working toward that goal.

2004 -- The Western Jurisdiction elects the Rev. Minerva Carcaño as the denomination’s first Latina bishop. A total of six women are elected as bishops, the largest number of women ever elected in a single year.

*The timeline was gleaned from the following United Methodist sources: General Commission on Archives and History, The United Methodist Church, website: [www.gcah.org](http://www.gcah.org). Pictures are available on the website. See especially [http://www.gcah.org/UMC\\_timeline.htm](http://www.gcah.org/UMC_timeline.htm).*

*General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, The United Methodist Church (from material used in their worship service, "Return to the Well: Service of Word and Journey," at the 2004 General Conference, May 2, 2004) website: [www.gcsrw.org](http://www.gcsrw.org). See also <http://www.gcsrw.org/about/timeline.htm>.*

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