



THE JOURNEY  
IS OUR HOME

*A History of the General Commission  
on the Status and Role of Women.*

CAROLYN HENNINGER OEHLER

We are here to proclaim that life is a journey, not a destination and that we live in the midst of promise fulfilled. This claim calls us to an awareness that we are held accountable by the One who gives us life. The promise reminds us that all we need to live is freely given to us. This is a journey which often takes us through the wilderness, where we receive manna and water and discover what it means to be the children of God. It is a journey we never take alone, for we know that the One who made the promise will keep the faith.

Hallelujah! Amen!

from *Worship Service of the Consultation of Clergywomen*,  
Dallas (Jan. 2, 1979)

#### Status of UMC Women—1972

54% of church members  
25.2% of total general board/agency staff  
21.9% of general board/agency voting members  
13% of General Conference delegates  
Less than 1% of all clergy  
0% of UM bishops

#### Status of UMC Women—2004

58% of church members  
29% of general (churchwide) agency professional staff  
68% of *total* general agency staff  
45% of general board/agency voting members  
37% of General Conference clergy delegates  
51% of General Conference lay delegates  
19% of all active United Methodist clergy\*  
22% of all active United Methodist bishops\*\*

\* 2002 GCFA figures

\*\*2005 Council of Bishops figures



## THE JOURNEY BEGINS

(1944-1972)

When the United Methodist General Conference voted to establish a Commission on the Status and Role of Women during its April 1972 session, it was a time of celebration for the advocates of fuller participation of women within the United Methodist Church. Those moments of exultation were preceded by years of hard work and struggle. This history begins, then, before the actual beginning of the Commission, with the hopes and dreams and organizing of diverse women united in a single goal – an organization within the new United Methodist Church which would assure that women were full members of the church and had equal access to ordination and decision-making positions.

The Women's Division of the new General Board of Global Ministries played a crucial role in the establishment of the Commission. The Division had been working for the full participation of women in the church for decades, beginning perhaps with the report "Women and the Church," prepared by Grace Bragg in 1944, while she was president of the Methodist Women's Division. In analyzing the Methodist *Discipline*, Bragg found widespread discrimination and general lack of opportunity for women throughout the structures of the church. The Women's Division used Bragg's well-publicized study to begin its work on full clergy rights for women, finally granted by the Methodist General Conference in 1956.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Carolyn Henninger Oehler, above, was a member of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women from 1976-1984, and served as president from 1978-1984.

In 1968 the Women's Division successfully petitioned the General Conference to create a study commission to document the extent to which women were involved at all structural levels in general program and policy-making channels and agencies of the United Methodist Church.

Although the 1968 General Conference authorized the study, they granted no funding and referred it to the research arm of the church for implementation. Without financing, this division of the Program Council was unable to begin the proposed study and turned to the Women's Division to provide funds. The Women's Division refused to fund the study. This refusal was a risk, for if the research group could not find the money to pay for meetings of the study committee, no study would be undertaken.

Women in mainline denominations were dissatisfied with their present exclusion from much of the church's life. Women's groups in Protestant denominations were almost always mission-oriented and had been formed because women were excluded from decision-making in denominational mission boards.

A task force created by the Program Council met in January 1970 to launch the study, even though they did not yet have funding. The task force based their work on an affirmation that was part of the Social Principles being proposed to the upcoming General Conference: "No one should be denied equal political, economic, legal or ecclesiastical rights of opportunities because of sex." The task force understood its task as assisting the United Methodist Church in "respond[ing] responsibly to the women's liberation movement." They also acknowledge "the fact that women have a legitimate right to revolt against the role in which society has imprisoned them. At a time in history when the technological and sociological revolutions have made the traditional, limited roles assigned to women obsolete, social mores and church practices continue to resist the emergence of new roles for women which are relevant for the last third of the twentieth century," the task force noted.

The study commission formed following the 1972 General Conference discovered in their research what the Women's Division, the Women's Caucus and many others already knew through their own analyses and experiences. Women were greatly underrepresented and sometimes totally absent from most significant decision-making arenas of the United Methodist Church. With the study commission's findings and recommendations in hand, women and their allies set about to achieve action-oriented results at the 1972 General Conference.

While the Women's Division was working through formal church structures and relationships, other women concerned with discrimination against women in the church were organizing to have an impact on the 1972 General Conference. In mid-1971, a movement that would result in the formation of the United Methodist Women's Caucus was gaining strength. More than 50 women gathered in Wheadon United Methodist Church in Evanston, Ill., Nov. 26-27, 1971, to organize to influence the General Conference. Members drafted a proposal for a Commission on Women and sent it to the Structure Study Commission, which would be proposing a structure for the new church. The Structure Commission rejected the request for a women's commission, but did recommend a women's unit within the division of Lay Life and Work of the new Board of Discipleship.

By the time of its second meeting in Nashville in February 1972, Caucus members realized that neither the Structure Study Commission nor the Commission on the Participation of Women would be proposing legislation adequate to establish a functional commission on women. Thelma Stevens, on behalf of the Caucus, wrote the legislation to establish a quadrennial

commission that was finally adopted by the General Conference.

While the General Conference delegates did approve an autonomous Commission on the Status and Role of Women, most seemed to have trouble taking it seriously. Although the women planning for and promoting the Commission made it clear that it was to be an active advocacy-style group, the overwhelmingly male conference saw it as another study commission. This perception, as well as the general disdain for anything having to do with women and women's issues, probably accounted for the low funding provided for the Commission.



## A NEW COMMISSION

(1972-1976)

General Conference had authorized a four-year commission. The organizational meeting of the quadrennial Commission on the Status and Role of Women began with a luncheon at the Sheraton Hilton Hotel in Cleveland on Sept. 18, 1972. Bishop Kenneth W. Copeland convened the group. Harriet Miller was elected the temporary chairwomen for the first session. Ben Garrison was named temporary secretary.

From the beginning, Commission members were concerned about their style of working together. They wanted to avoid the rigidity and legalisms of the "*Robert's Rules of Order* approach" and at the same time wanted a process that would get the job done. They expressed their intention to work by consensus as much as possible and to use parliamentary procedure only when necessary. They expected to vote only on matters relating to personnel, budget and any official statements made by the Commission.

During that first meeting, members shared their hopes for the Commission and for some ways in which the work might be organized. Some of those were:

- Support for women in ministry
- Recognition of women as competent and serious
- A desire that women might take their places of leadership at all levels of the church
- A desire to pioneer in the humanizing process and the liberation of both women and men
- Freeing women not just in the church but in society as a whole



"[In 1972] women were seeking to be ordained in growing numbers, but the church was not really ready for them... Local churches did not want women as ministers."

—**Barbara Ricks**

**Thompson,**

*first GCSRW president, who served from 1972 until 1978. She later became the General Secretary of the General Commission on Religion and Race, whose mandate is to monitor and advocate on behalf of racial justice in the United Methodist Church.*

- Broadening women's vision in local congregations
- Hope for equal pay for equal work developing support groups
- The desire to be accepted without stereotyping and without facing the demand for excellence at all times
- Hope for sharing images of ourselves and of feelings we have about who we are as sexual persons
- Doing exposés of places in the church where people are hurting because of sexism

The Commission members adopted an annual budget of \$50,000, more than one-quarter of which would be spent on Commission meetings. After intense discussion of various patterns of leadership for the Commission, they elected as president, Barbara Thompson; as recording secretary, Jeanne Audrey Powers; and five vice presidents who would chair the task forces through which the Commission would do its work. Tom Graves was elected chair of Research and Dissemination of Information; Harriet Miller, Theological and Biblical Perspectives; Bonnie Jones-Goldstein, Employed Women in the Church;

Sally Underwood, Lay Participation; and Toni White, Life Styles and Special Concerns of Minority Women.

The Commission viewed the Study Commission on the Participation of Women in the United Methodist Church as their predecessor group and took their recommendations as part of the Commission's responsibility. Based on that report, they articulated several functions that became the organizing principles for their work: doing and collecting research, developing new understanding of theology and biblical history affecting the status of women, ensuring the full participation of both women employed by the church and of lay women, and developing understandings of changing lifestyles affecting women.

The Steering Committee, made up of the officers and task force chairs, was given the responsibility of recommending candidates for the newly created position of Executive Secretary. By the time the Commission met again in March 1973, they had elected by mail ballot Nancy (Nan) Grissom Self, a clergywoman, and Judith Leaming-Elmer, a laywoman, as the Executive Secretariat. Office space was located at Garrett-Evangelical Seminary in Evanston, Ill. The new quadrennial commission had officers, a staff and a home office.

One of the issues addressed during that first quadrennium was the style of the Executive Secretariat. The church bureaucracy, organized as a hierarchy, found it difficult to understand and deal with two equal staff

heads. The General Council on Ministries, for example, would recognize only one staff member of the Commission as the "official" member of the Council. So the Commission paid for the other member of the Secretariat to attend the meetings of the Council, where she was given a visitor's badge.

The style of commission work has always been important to members and staff. The consensus style of decision-making was used from the beginning and was regularly discussed by the Commission. This decision-making style, so different from parliamentary procedure and *Robert's Rules of Order*, depends on full participation of members and places power with the consensus-builders. The Commission wanted to eliminate win-lose decisions and to build community through decision making. Some of the men who were members of the Commission went on record as affirming the richness of their own participation, finding the atmosphere and the process less militant, more reasonable and sensible than meetings run by *Robert's Rules*. The consensus style would become closely identified with the Commission over the years and would pose a challenge to successive presidents.

Racism and its links with sexism were on the Commission's agenda from the very beginning. The concerns and struggles of racial/ethnic women were addressed in the task force on Third World Women and through the Commission's agenda. The first Hispanic women's conference in the church was held that quadrennium, under the leadership of Lydia Saenz and Consuela Urquiza. In 1974, a joint task force including members and staff of the Commissions on Religion and Race and Status and Role of Women was organized around issues of common concern.

From the beginning the Commission saw itself as concerned about the treatment of women within church structures. The Commission began to accept cases on behalf of women who appealed for advocacy to combat discrimination against them. A Talent Bank was established to assist groups within the church seeking women for employment and leadership. Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary student Sharon Rader, (later elected a bishop of the church), was the first staff person to manage the Talent Bank.

In a document titled *Themes of Oppression* (1975), the Task Force on Women Employed by the Church identified a pattern of complex themes that reappear in situations where women are employed in areas previously dominated by men. These themes provided the foundation for the work on advocacy and affirmative action that the Commission would undertake within the church. Such themes as inadequate job delineation,



unclear and inadequate personnel policies, lack of grievance procedures, and differing evaluation criteria were addressed in specific cases the Commission was asked to investigate.

In 1974 regional training events were co-sponsored with the Women's Division and the Women's Caucus to prepare women for the upcoming General Conference. This began a pattern of regional training events held every quadrennium to develop women's leadership in annual conference commissions and to provide networking opportunities.

The first Consultation of Ordained Women was co-sponsored with the Division of Ordained Ministry in 1975. The idea for such a consultation grew out of requests for advocacy from clergywomen serving in difficult circumstances and a more general feeling of isolation often expressed by clergywomen.

During that first quadrennium, the Commission suggested a curriculum unit on the changing lifestyle patterns of women and men to help local church members deal with these issues. The Commission was consultant to the Curriculum Resources Committee throughout the process of

curriculum development, field-testing, publication and promotion.

A publication written solely by women to give an opportunity for expression and to create a wider understanding of women's life journeys was proposed by Commission staff to the Upper Room. *Images: Women in Transition* was published in 1976 as a result of that advocacy. The editor was able to choose from more than five hundred submissions from women throughout the church.

The report to the 1976 General Conference from the Commission included statistics that had been gathered during that quadrennium on the participation of women in the church and the presence and status of clergywomen in the church. Sixty (out of seventy-three) annual conferences had voluntarily organized commissions, committees, task forces or some other structure to carry out advocacy work related to the status and role of women. The Commission ended that first four years of its life with a balance of \$364.45 and no reserve funds.

The 1976 General Conference in Portland, Ore., established the Commission as an ongoing agency of the church. At that conference, twenty-one percent of the delegates were women (up from thirteen percent in 1972). This conference also had the first clergywomen delegates to a United Methodist General Conference.



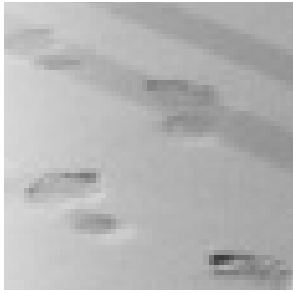
## A STANDING COMMISSION AT LAST

(1977-1980)

The Commission had little time to celebrate its establishment as a standing, ongoing agency of the church. Barbara Thompson was re-elected president; Beverly Anderson later (Beverly Shamana) was secretary. Judy Leaming-Elmer left the Executive Secretariat in 1976, and Trudie Kibbe Preciphs and Kiyoko Kasai Fujii joined in March and April 1977 to comprise the first three-person team. Now a continuing agency in the church, the Commission settled in to address its agenda for the long term.

The accomplishments of this second quadrennium illustrate the catalytic function of the Commission as it joined with other agencies and groups within the church to sponsor events and address issues. In 1978 the "Bushel Basket Workshop" for women in media was co-sponsored with United Methodist Communications. That same year the Talent Bank was discontinued and the activity of identifying qualified, interested women for church employment and leadership was referred to the annual conference commissions.

The advocacy function of the Commission took on new energy and focus. A set of guidelines and procedures were developed to assist the Commission in responding to grievances of women employed by the church. The guidelines detailed the manner in which the Commission would respond to notification of discriminatory practices and/or policies negatively affecting women because of their gender. Annual conference commissions and committees were seen by the Commission as the first-line



“Although women are often described as the ‘backbone’ of the church, the study commission found that ‘backbone’ did not mean those parts of the church where decisions are made about policy, finances, and direction. It did not mean the professional ministry.”  
—from the first GCSRW brochure (1979)

arena of support and defense for women seeking assistance, and the conference commissions began to use these guidelines as tools for their own work.

The second Consultation of United Methodist Clergywomen was co-sponsored with the Division of Ordained Ministry and held in Dallas in January 1979. More than seven hundred clergywomen attended in the midst of an ice storm.

The Commission continued its focus on concerns of racial/ethnic women, working to ascertain as fully as possible the needs and struggles of these women and to raise awareness about women’s concerns within racial/ethnic groups. Staff and commission members were involved in racial/ethnic caucuses and meetings to represent these concerns and to raise issues affecting racial/ethnic women.

The first issue of *The Flyer*, a monthly newsletter, was published in June 1978. The main purpose of the newsletter was to strengthen communication with the annual conference commissions. *The Flyer* was distributed in bulk to annual conferences, which were responsible for further distribution to annual conference commission members and clergywomen.

Joan Hamm was the first editor. “Options for Action” from annual conferences, job announcements for women, a bibliography and the work of the Commission shaped the content of the first newsletter.

Barbara Thompson resigned as president of the Commission in 1978. Carolyn Henninger Oehler was elected to complete the quadrennial team. Barbara Troxell chaired the Biblical and Theological Perspectives task force; Paul Santillan chaired Communications and Research; Evelyn Strong chaired Full Participation of Lay Women; Geraldine Heilman chaired Life Components; Euba Harris Winton chaired Third World Women’s Concerns; and Mary Hurmence chaired Women Employed by the Church. Administrative Committees were chaired by George Walters, Finance; Velma Yemoto, Nominations; and H. Sharon Howell, Personnel.

Reflections on and discussion of biblical and theological issues have always played a central role in the work of the Commission. In 1978, following theological reflection and writing by a task force, the Commission adopted a credal statement written by Barbara Troxell. At the same time, the Commission was intensifying its concerns about the exclusive, male-oriented nature of language referring to God. The Commission was one of several groups that petitioned the 1980 General Conference to authorize a study of language about God.



The Commission is commonly known at all levels of church life as "COSROW" (pronounced KAHZ-rob).

"Women in New Worlds: Historical Perspectives on the United Methodist Tradition," a National Conference on Church Women's History, was held in February 1980. The Commission followed up the conference with a petition to the General Conference urging that steps be taken toward safeguarding, strengthening and financing continuing work in women's history, including the history of racial/ethnic women in the church.

In preparation for the 1980 General Conference, the Commission renewed research on the level of participation of women in church leadership positions. This monitoring activity was part of a larger effort to hold boards, agencies, seminaries and annual conference structures accountable for including women in significant numbers and roles in decision-making bodies of the church.

The three-member Executive Secretariat model of staffing was developed during this quadrennium. Each member had her own distinct portfolio. The function of coordinator was passed among the three on a six-month rotation. The model continued to be controversial in the hierarchical general church system, yet was seen by many as a

pluralism mirror for the whole church. Comprehensive personnel policies and a formalized process for staff performance and review were put into place during this first quadrennium as a standing commission.

The Commission was active in advocating for the election of a woman bishop at the 1980 Jurisdictional Conferences. Marjorie Swank Matthews was elected bishop in Dayton, Ohio, on July 17, 1980, the first woman bishop in the United Methodist Church and in the Anglican or Protestant traditions.



## ADVOCATE/CATALYST/MONITOR (1980-1984)

At the start of this quadrennium, the Commission reorganized around the functions of advocate, catalyst and monitor. Commission members now worked in three work units organized around function, rather than six task forces organized around constituencies. The new units were called Monitoring and Research, chaired by Ken Vining; Education and Advocacy, chaired by Beverly J. Shamana (Anderson); and Annual Conferences/Constituency Services, chaired by Sharon Everhart. The portfolios of the three members of the Secretariat also focused on these functions. Officers for this quadrennium were Carolyn Henninger Oehler, president; Ondina Santos Gonzalez, the first-ever solo vice president; and Charles Stewart III, secretary.

Reflecting on the first two quadrennia of the Commission's work, the Secretariat pointed out that work had been conducted primarily among the general agencies of the church, assuming that fuller participation of women and more inclusive policies would bring heightened awareness and attention to women's issues. While some success in this strategy was noted, there was still a far distance to go. Looking ahead, the Secretariat predicted that increased energy would be needed to support annual conference commissions in organizing, developing leadership and addressing the agenda of participation and empowerment of women, sometimes in environments hostile to their work.

The goals of the Commission for these four years were established early in the quadrennium. These goals committed the Commission to consult with general agencies and seminaries to enable them to develop and



"Feminist spirituality is a helpful expression of sanctifying grace, too. Feminist spirituality is at home in the world of not-yet ... I have abandoned the ladder and begun the dance."

—Clergyman Ted Leach  
GCSRW member  
(1981-1984)

implement affirmative action plans and personnel policies. The Commission also planned to work to eradicate discriminatory language and images within the church; to heighten awareness about issues facing racial/ethnic women and to develop strategies to address the issues; to get women into leadership positions within the church at all levels; to educate the church in male/female dynamics and to train teams in this educational process.

In response to legislation passed by the 1980 General Conference, the General Council of Ministries created a task force to study language and imagery about God. Carolyn Henninger Oehler was elected by the task force to chair this study. The continuing concern of the Commission for the use of inclusive language and imagery within the United Methodist Church was now being addressed through official church structures.

In the fall of 1980, *The Flyer* moved to a bimonthly publication schedule, reflecting budget constraints. This reduced schedule meant a move away from time-dated materials and more emphasis on analytical and in-depth articles. Patricia Broughton was now the editor. In the fall of 1981, *Flyer* readers were asked for the first time for donations to cover the cost of the publication.

Conferences, consultations and training events expanded the Commission's influence and helped to address priority issues. Training in male/female dynamics, a workshop on changing sexist patterns, a consultation of United Methodist racial/ethnic clergywomen, the third consultation of clergywomen and workshops on moving from sexism to egalitarian relationships conducted by Commission members and staff for a seminary and a general agency all gave this quadrennium the character of working together on issues of oppression toward liberation and mutuality.

The Commission's approach to advocacy for women in the church underwent revision during this time. Attention was turned from individual cases toward situations having the possibility for systemic change affecting a group or class of women.

A request from Boston University School of Theology students, faculty and staff brought the Commission into its widest-ranging advocacy case to date. A popular and effective staff person was terminated by the administration, an action that brought long-simmering concerns to a boil. The charge from a group of women and men at Boston was that the school of theology was engaging in discriminatory sexist personnel practices and procedures affecting women in every aspect of the school's operation. The Commission investigated the charges.

A four-person team spent three days at the Boston school in 1982, interviewing and observing morale and communication among students, faculty and staff. They made recommendations to the school administration



In 1980, Marjorie Swank Matthews, (top) became the first woman elected bishop in the United Methodist Church—or in any mainline Protestant or Anglican communion. Leontine T.C. Kelly, (center) an African-American pastor from Virginia, became the first woman of color elected a United Methodist bishop in 1984. Judith Craig, the third United Methodist woman bishop, was also elected in 1984.

and to the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. The Commission continued to monitor the compliance of Boston with the recommendations and with the school's own affirmative action goals of adding women and racial/ethnic persons to the faculty and staff. The Commission anticipated that full implementation of their recommendations would have positive implications for the entire seminary system of the church.

At the urging of the Commission during this quadrennium, general agencies began to add policies for dealing with sexual harassment to their personnel policies and procedures. Packets sent by the Commission to the general agencies to assist them in this process defined sexual harassment and provided examples of grievance processes and resources for understanding and dealing with complaints. The concern about sexual harassment emerged through the Commission's advocacy work with women complaining about harassment while employed with the church.

A tenth birthday party at the fall 1982 Commission meeting gave members, staff and friends an opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments of the first ten years.

"Empowering Women for the Second Decade" was the theme of the regional

training events for this quadrennium (1983). Workshops on monitoring, on identifying and empowering constituency groups and on advocacy for women in church structures gave participants both skills and encouragement for working in their annual conferences. Networking, many questions and some answers, and inclusive worship experiences provided vision and hope, and tools to craft further action for those who attended.

Advocacy procedures and practices continued to evolve during this quadrennium. By the end of the four years, the Executive Secretariat could report that eighty to eighty-five percent of all queries were being handled informally and without written complaint. Complaints from clergywomen were being channeled to the Board of Higher Education and Ministry. When a formal complaint was filed and investigated, the Commission was providing follow-up monitoring for compliance with recommendations.

Trudie Preciphs left the Executive Secretariat before the 1984 General Conference for a staff position at the General Council on Ministries. The search for her replacement began right after the conference session.

Two women were elected to the episcopacy at the 1984 Jurisdictional Conferences – Leontine T.C. Kelly, the first African-American woman bishop in Anglican and Protestant traditions, in the Western Jurisdiction and Judith Craig in the North Central Jurisdiction. Now there were three women bishops in the United Methodist Church.



## DEEPENING ANALYSES (1985-1988)

The 1984 General Conference mandated local church commissions on the status and role of women, placing before the general and annual conference commissions the challenge of establishing and empowering these local church groups. This task was particularly daunting to annual conference commissions that were inexperienced or even inactive, on limited budgets and in nonsupportive conference environments.

The officers for this quadrennium were H. Sharon Howell, president; Ressie Mae Bass, vice president; Ernest Valverde, secretary; Sharon Everhart, Issue Development, Education and Advocacy; Tapuni "Cap" Ioelu, Annual Conferences/Constituency Services; Charles Stewart III, Monitoring and Research; Elizabeth Reed, Personnel; Ruth Steach, Evaluation and Review; Joetta Rinehart, Finance; Margaret Misal, Nominations.

Monitoring the church in all arenas for the inclusion of women was a primary task of the Commission from its beginning. In addition to the research done for each general conference report on the inclusion of women in the life of the church, the Commission worked through liaison relationships with general agencies as well as desktop auditing and onsite visitation of agencies, seminaries, and special committees and projects. Qualitative as well as quantitative monitoring was promoted to name the ways in which women were still excluded from full participation although present on committees or employed in increasing numbers. Merely increasing the number of women in certain arenas will





Laywoman Kiyoko Kasai Fujii served as part of the Commission's three-woman General Secretariat from 1971 until her retirement in 1991. Today, she resides in the Chicago area, and works as a consultant on race and gender issues.

not necessarily change the system or structure, monitors reported to the Commission.

Geneva Harton Dalton was elected to the General Secretariat in the spring of 1985.

The Commission affirmed its vision for the quadrennium: "We envision a community united in Christ, revitalized by the gifts of feminist spirituality and theology to our tradition, which accepts as full participants in our life and ministry all persons, regardless of gender, racial/ethnic background, sexual orientation, class or physical/emotional condition." The goals set for the quadrennium included an in-house study to understand the ways homophobia hurts the whole church, education in feminist spirituality and inclusive language, exploring the linkages of racism and sexism, developing training resources for annual conference and local church commissions and monitoring the hymnal committee, the missional priority committee and seminaries.

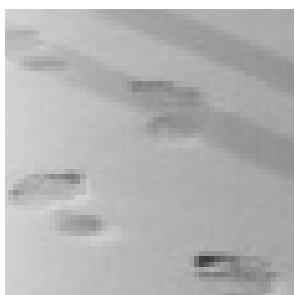
A national Hispanic women's consultation was held in April 1985, bringing together almost 200 women from across the nation who traced their cultural roots to countries in South America, Central America and the islands of the Caribbean

and Mexico. Commission members and staff played key roles in the planning, along with persons from the Women's Division and the Commission on Religion and Race. Concentration on feminist spirituality marked this quadrennium as it had previous ones.

The Commission conducted a one-day study of homophobia and its linkages with sexism at its spring 1986 meeting. Included in the study were reading materials; lectures; performance by a mime; a quiz on stereotypes; stories from lesbians, a gay man and parents of homosexual children; liturgy; songs; and small group sharing. An essential part of the study was the opportunity for Commission members to meet gay and lesbian United Methodists and their parents and to hear their stories. The Commission shared its model for the study with other general agencies, encouraging them to study as well.

Geneva Harton Dalton wrote of the experience: "It is an Exodus event to enter this yet unknown territory and it may be a long time before we reach the promised land of understanding and compassion for all; not only for the homosexual but for those of us caught in the bondage of homophobia as well. With an issue that tears at the fabric of the faith community, perhaps we can offer some threads of hope and healing.

"Homophobia is not only painful to those members of the gay community, but to all of us who are caught in the web of irrational fear and hatred of homosexual persons. I think that we in the church must reach out in



"Tell them we are Native American women in the United Methodist Church and we are coming into our own!"

—Participants in a GCSRW-sponsored consultation, November 1987

love to embrace everyone and trust God's grace to care for the sinfulness in each of us."

The Commission's decision to grant \$1,000 to the March 1987 Convocation of Reconciling Congregations was subsequently revoked by the General Council on Finance and Administration. The Council took its authority from the United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, paragraph 906.12, which explicitly prohibits the use of funds "to promote the acceptance of homosexuality." The Council objected particularly to one of the workshops, "Rituals for Lesbian/Gay Lives," fearing that it might promote homosexuality. The Commission protested this action, calling it arbitrary and capricious, and asking for the procedural guidelines used by the Council to make such decisions.

Regional training events in 1987 gathered annual conference commission members around the theme "Claiming Our Connections: Empowering One Another."

Renewed charges of institutional sexism at Boston University School of Theology brought another investigation of charges of racism and sexism and central administration's dominating influences and

practices. The request for an investigation came from an associate professor terminated by the administration, as well as from other concerned students and faculty. Both the individual case and wider issues of systemic sexism were investigated by a team from both the Commissions on Status and Role of Women and Religion and Race.

In this quadrennium the Commission continued the practice of gathering statistics on the participation of women in local churches. These 1987 statistics show an increase in women's participation and leadership. Similar to past surveys, this one showed that men were more likely to serve on and chair the administrative board, the trustees and the finance committee. Women were more likely to provide service and leadership in education and other program committees/councils, except for stewardship. Within racial/ethnic churches, women participated at higher rates both in worship attendance and on church committees than in nonethnic congregations. The exception to this was preaching. When the pastor was a man, only one-third of the ethnic congregations had heard a woman preach, compared with two-thirds of the nonethnic congregations.

"Tell them we are Native American Women in the United Methodist Church, and we are coming into our own." This message came from one hundred forty Native American women from forty tribes and forty-three annual conferences who attended a consultation in November 1987, sponsored by the Commission, the Native American International Caucus and the



"The struggle in my life becomes your struggle."

—Eveline "Tweedy"

**Sombreno**, Navajo and United Methodist clergywoman, said in 1987. In 2003, she joined church leaders and Vanderbilt University students in a silent demonstration against the U.S. war with Iraq. (UMNS photo by Mike Dubose)

Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference. This gathering for worship and workshops and networking was fruit of the Commission's continuing efforts to empower racial/ethnic women and to expose the connections between racism and sexism.

The Commission convened a committee to compile a comprehensive set of priorities based on information from the consultations, conferences and seminars held by and for ethnic women over the previous ten years. The ethnic caucuses reviewed and endorsed the recommendations. A number of recommendations were common to all racial/ethnic groups. Heading the list was the recommendation to actively recruit racial/ethnic women to serve at all levels of the church. Other common recommendations included studying the linkages between racism and sexism; advocating appointments for racial/ethnic women to positions beyond "first appointment churches" within one's own ethnic community; developing legislation for General Conference that will address the issues of equal pay for equal work as they relate to racial/ethnic women; and developing a "survival kit" for racial/ethnic women entering seminary.

In the spring of 1988, the Commission took note of the issues that continued to both nourish and haunt its work – inclusive language, advocacy for women of color, consensus-style decision-making, monitoring the church for inclusiveness and homophobia. They acknowledged that none of the issues were new, none were settled and none were going away very soon. They prepared for the 1988 General Conference session aware that the controversy generated by their study of the linkages between homophobia and sexism had overshadowed the other accomplishments of the quadrennium. They were soon to learn how strong the forces against their work and even continued existence were.

Patricia Broughton left as *Flyer* editor, having served since November 1979, from the ninth to fifty-second issue.

The 1988 General Conference marked a new high in the participation and leadership of women. Fifty percent of the lay delegates were women, thirty-one percent overall. Four of the eleven legislative committees were chaired by women; twenty-one of the thirty-three legislative committee offices were held by women.

During the legislative business of the General Conference, the conference voted on the question of whether or not to continue to have a General Commission on the Status and Role of Women. While the arguments for abolishing the Commission seemed to suggest that its work was completed and there was no longer any need for the work it had been doing, the underlying motivation for the attack was more likely the

RIGHT: Former GCSRW presidents and members of the executive/general secretariat reunite in Nashville in 1995. They include (front, from left) Kiyoko Kasai Fujiu, Geneva Harton Dalton, Cecelia M. Long (back row, from left) Nancy Grissom Self, Barbara Ricks Thompson, Trudie Kibbe Reed, Stephanie Anna Hixon, and Carolyn Henninger Oehler.

controversial study of homophobia conducted in 1986. The electronic voting system used by the General Conference showed that the Commission was continued into the next quadrennium by a twenty-two-vote margin. Commission members, staff and supporters left the conference shaken but determined to communicate better with the church on the importance and effectiveness of the Commission's work.

The July 1988 Jurisdictional Conferences elected two more women bishops, bringing the number to five women elected to the episcopacy in the United Methodist Church. Susan Murch Morrison and Sharon A. Brown Christopher joined Bishops Judith Craig and Leontine T.C. Kelly, who had been elected in 1984. Bishop Marjorie Swank Matthews had died in 1986.





## COMPLETING TWENTY YEARS (1989-1992)

The newly elected Commission members said goodbye to Geneva Harton Dalton, who had left the Secretariat in August to take a position with the denomination's General Council on Finance and Administration. They elected Linda Thomas, president; Joetta Rinehart, vice president; and Winonah McGee, secretary. Other members of the coordinating committee were Bert Preuss-Jones, Annual Conference/Constituency Services; Elizabeth Lopez Spence, Issue Development, Education and Advocacy; Marie Rivera, Monitoring and Research; Don Mendenhall, Evaluation and Review; Becky Haase, Finance; Bill Mullette, Nominations; Naomi P.F. Southard, Personnel; Marcus Dickson, Legislative Coordinator.

In January 1989, Cecelia M. Long joined the Secretariat of the Commission. The first joint racism/sexism task force of the Commissions on Religion and Race and Status and Role of Women had floundered and died without a common vision on the connection of racism and sexism. A new task force was established in 1989 to again address across organizational divisions the concerns of racial/ethnic women. This time the task force was responding to a request of the 1988 General Conference that these commissions help local churches develop models for addressing the combined effects of racism and sexism.

Mindful of the recent close vote of the General Conference on the continued life of the Commission and wanting to enhance its communication efforts, the

Commission formed an ongoing communication and interpretation group to strengthen its communication efforts with local churches and other members of its constituency. The three-year plan of action included sponsoring more listening events around the country to hear from women and men in their needs; clarifying the differing roles of the Women's Division, the Women's Caucus and the Commission; sponsoring issues forums on such topics as feminization of poverty, sexual harassment, volunteerism, sexual abuse, ageism and child care; distributing the Commission's existing resource materials and developing new materials for use by annual conferences and local churches; and using the media more effectively.

In the fall of 1990, Linda Thomas resigned her position as president of the Commission. Joetta Rinehart was elected to complete the quadrennial term. Winonah McGee became vice president; Margie Titus, secretary; Anita Wood, chairperson of Monitoring and Research work unit; and Don Williams, chairperson of the Finance Committee.

Nancy Grissom Self retired on June 30, 1991. She was a member of the first

Commission and had been a member of the Secretariat since 1973. Kiyoko Kasai Fujiu also retired on June 30, 1991. She was a member of the Secretariat from 1977 to 1991. Searches were begun to fill these positions.

"Common Threads: Our Pain, Our Faith, Our Vision" was the theme of the regional training events held for annual conference commission members during this quadrennium. Held each quadrennium in the year before General Conference, these events were designed to offer networking opportunities, sharing of successes and struggles, strategy building, worship and bible study, and visions for the future.

In 1990 the General Council on Ministries released the results of a study mandated by the 1988 General Conference to examine sexual harassment in the United Methodist Church. Fifty percent of clergy respondents to the survey, twenty percent of the laity, forty-eight percent of the students and thirty-seven percent of persons employed by the church reported having a sexual harassment experience in a United Methodist Church setting. The report of the study detailed the attitudes and experiences of members with sexual harassment, discussed the implications of the findings and presented the current denominational response to sexual harassment through the policies and procedures of its institutions.

The Commission made concerns about sexual harassment and violence against women a central part of its work for this quadrennium.



"Participants in 1991 Women's Congress dyed and hung strips of silk as expressions of their creative gifts."

Stephanie Anna Hixon became a member of the General Secretariat on July 1, 1991. She joined Cecelia M. Long in a two-person Secretariat, the first since Nancy Grissom Self and Judy Leaming-Elmer comprised the first Secretariat.

The sexual harassment of women within the United Methodist Church continued to emerge as a defining issue for the Commission. They petitioned the 1992 General Conference to update the earlier resolution on sexual harassment by calling on the church to develop specific plans toward eliminating sexual harassment throughout the denomination. The Commission stated its commitment to work with other bodies in the church to develop educational resources on sexual harassment and ways to address the problem within the church.

The fifth survey of women's participation in the church was conducted and released in the fall of 1991. The survey showed that the broad patterns of women's participation in local churches had not changed substantially over the 20 years in which the data had been collected. The disparity between the participation of women in their local churches and their leadership was still the most dramatic in the boards and committees

that exercise the broadest authority within local churches. Women were most likely to serve on and chair those areas traditionally associated with women and women's work: mission, education, and children's education and ministry. Men were still more likely to serve on and chair the power and money committees, such as the administrative board, the board of trustees and the finance committee. The report concluded that the church reflects the views of the larger society of which it is a part. Churches seemed still to be resisting including women in leadership positions in offices traditionally held by men.

The Commission's monitoring teams found both progress and challenge in their review nine United Methodist seminaries between 1985 and 1990. The teams found the schools were working on inclusive language and making efforts to increase the number of women on faculties, staffs and in administration. The Commission recommended that the seminaries develop policies to deal with sexual harassment and on the recruitment of women for students as well as faculty. The teams reported a frequent lack of guarantee that theology courses would include exposure to women's scholarship.



## THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

(1992-2004)

The 1992 General Conference had a different tone for the Commission. Its work was affirmed and even celebrated – a twenty-year birthday cake appeared during one of the breaks and was served to the delegates!

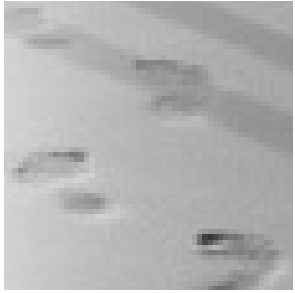
At the 1992 Jurisdictional Conferences, Sharon Zimmerman Rader (who had served as GCSRW's first intern when she was a seminary student in 1974-75), Ann Sherer and Mary Ann Swenson were elected to the episcopacy. Now there were women serving in every jurisdiction except the Southeastern. The journey to empowerment had reached the highest clergy office in the church.

There was much to celebrate at the twentieth anniversary of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women as a standing commission of the United Methodist Church, 1976-2006. One way to prepare for the future is to understand and celebrate the past.

Amazement and thanksgiving are generated in this story of ways in which women and men have organized against great odds to make the United Methodist Church more hospitable to and inclusive of women. This is not the story of a popularity contest or finding the easy path. The issues joined and the conflicts engaged are critical to the health of the United Methodist Church.

Throughout, there is a sustaining Commission — members and staff — who build and rebuild community as they address their mandates. It is a lesson in the





"In my pondering, an insight comes to me of what it means to be a marginal person, the purpose which I must achieve, the goal for which I must strive. It is to develop a holistic life, embracing two polarities and bringing them together as a whole. The experiences of marginality enrich and add to life's fullness.

—Clergywoman  
and GCSRW member

**Nancy S. Yamasaki**  
(1987)

symbiotic relationship between being a viable community and being an effective change agent.

We are unique human beings  
linked with all of creation and  
gathered from diverse places  
to share a ministry faithfully,  
to raise questions hopefully,  
to work for justice lovingly.

In whom and in what do we  
believe?

We believe in God, eternal yet  
ever-moving One,  
who creates and is creating,  
who keeps covenant with humankind,  
who sets before us the ways of life  
and death.

We believe in Jesus,  
the Servant-Advocate  
who lived the way of dying/rising,  
who embodied justice  
and reconciliation,  
who, with authority, calls us to share  
this way and this embodying.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,  
sustaining Presence and transforming  
Power, who dwells among us in  
clarity and in mystery,

who inspires us individually and  
corporately,  
who challenges, prods, emboldens.

We believe in the Church,  
community of faith and caring,  
covenant and promise,  
which nurtures our pilgrimage,  
and  
through which we are called to  
be witnesses to God's truth,  
love and justice.

We believe our believing affects  
our daily walking and talking,  
our doubting and struggling,  
our decisions and  
choice-making,  
our responses to persons  
and systems.

We intend in this community in these days  
to raise questions hopefully,  
to work for justice lovingly,  
to share a ministry faithfully,  
and, by God's grace,  
passionately!

--Creedal statement for the Commission, written  
by clergywoman Barbara Troxell (1978)

## DETERMINING THE BASELINE

### Continuing Work on Sexual

**Harassment:** When the Commission reorganized following the 1992 General Conference, its agenda was already partially shaped by the sexual harassment work the previous Commission had done. The General Council on Ministries (GCOM), following a directive of the 1988 General Conference, had conducted a study of sexual harassment in the United Methodist Church, releasing its findings in 1990.

The study noted that 50.7 percent of clergy respondents, 19.9 percent of laity, 48.2 percent of students and 37.3 percent of employees reported at least one sexual harassment experience in a United Methodist Church setting. Women in all categories reported being objects of sexually harassing behaviors; laywomen had the lowest percentage reporting an incident (23 percent), while female clergy reported the highest (77.2 percent). Many laity and clergy reported an incident that occurred at a church social function. Students reported incidents occurring in classrooms, social functions and dormitory visits.

Laity reported that other church members

(45.2 percent) were the perpetrators. Laywomen reported their pastors (17.1 percent) engaged in sexual harassment. Clergywomen reported a colleague or other pastor (41.8 percent). Male clergy reported parishioners as the source of unwanted sexual attention (51.9 percent). Clearly, the work of the Commission on reducing sexual harassment in United Methodist settings and encouraging policies and procedures to deal with it when reported was not completed.

The Commission had petitioned the 1992 General Conference to continue to address sexual harassment by undertaking a specific plan to eliminate sexual harassment throughout the denomination. Implementation focused on education, including the Commission's task of developing resources for all parts of the church. Policies and procedures were to be developed, refined and monitored, in partnership with the General Board of Church and Society. And self-assessment was to continue within church bodies to evaluate the effectiveness of the work to eradicate sexual harassment.

The Commission's newsletter, *The Flyer*, summarized the Commission's posture entering the 1992 General Conference and in support of the petition: "[The Commission] continues to serve in an advocacy role for women who are victims of sexual harassment and seeks to work in partnerships with other church entities to eradicate sexual harassment and eliminate sexism in all its manifestations from the total life of The United Methodist Church." (*The Flyer*, Fall/Winter 1991-92)



"The kinds of sexual harassment which disturb me more are the actions of my brother clergy, who seem to offer unsolicited looks, touches and comments ... [I] sometimes wonder if they do that in their congregations as well."

—Anonymous UM clergywoman (1990)

**Women's Participation in Local Churches:** Another baseline for the Commission's work was contained in its quadrennial survey of participation of women in the work of local churches. In analyzing the data gained from the fifth survey of this kind, Charles H. Stewart III noted that women's participation had not changed much in its broad patterns. The disparity between the participation of women in the work of local churches and their leadership was still the starkest in the board and committees that exercise the broadest authority within local churches. Thus, men are more likely to serve on and chair the administrative board, the board of trustees and the finance committee, while women are more likely to serve on and chair those committees related to traditional women's areas, such as missions, education and children's age-level ministries.

The Commission learned that the leadership of women in local churches mirrors the society at large. Stewart noted resistance from within the churches to sharing leadership in areas typically reserved for men. Although the total membership of the church was more than half women, the leadership in local churches did not reflect

this percentage. So, empowerment of women in local churches must also appear on the Commission's agenda as they enter the new quadrennium.

**Clergywomen's Leadership:** In the spring of 1992, fifty-six of the five hundred thirty-four district superintendents in the United States and Puerto Rico were women. In the seventy-four annual conferences, eight women were serving as conference council directors. Clergywomen made up eleven percent of the clergy. Following the 1992 Jurisdictional Conferences, there were six active women bishops. Three were newly elected in 1992: Ann Sherer, Sharon Zimmerman Rader and Mary Ann Swenson.

Each of the newly elected bishops was invited by *The Flyer* to reflect on the need for an inclusive episcopacy. Bishop Ann Sherer (South Central Jurisdiction) said, "We can't continue to be a church that is limited in our outlook or limited in our constituency. We must have leaders who are women and men, who are Asian and Native American and Hispanic and white. That's necessary in the college [of Bishops], and that's necessary in the church."

Bishop Sharon Zimmerman Rader (North Central Jurisdiction) reflected: "There is representation, and then there is inclusiveness. We can do some ensuring of representation through the law. Inclusiveness is a matter of spirit and heart, of conversion."

And from Bishop Mary Ann Swenson (Western Jurisdiction): "We need to keep lifting the names of



**Trudie Kibbe Reed**

(above), a former member of the GCSRW General Secretariat, recalls, "Consensus was more than decision-making inside the Commission meetings. It was more discerning where God was moving the whole church ... In that arena we really did yield ourselves to the will of God."

persons [for the episcopacy] who are leaders and keep honoring their leadership and encouraging the church to listen and to be responsive to their leadership. One of the kinds of transitions that we seek is one that moves from emphasis on competition towards emphasis on cooperation. That means seeking ways that we can be supportive and can mutually strengthen each other in ministry so that we help the whole church." (Quotes from *The Flyer*, Fall 1992)

**General Conference Affirmation:** The 1992 General Conference passed a resolution supporting the Commission and its work. The resolution was in celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the creation of the Commission in 1972. It affirmed the work of and the necessity for the Commission, supported the work the Commission was doing to educate the church on and respond to the issues of sexual harassment, and supported the work and funding of the Commission to insure representation by women in all levels of the church. The resolution passed the General Conference seven hundred six to one hundred ninety-two.

So the Commission organized for the quadrennium with its work already largely

outlined by what had gone before. Elected leaders were: new bishop Ann Sherer, president; Joyce Waldon Bright, vice president; and John Campbell, secretary. Stephanie Anna Hixon and Cecelia M. Long comprised the Secretariat. Priorities for the four years of work were determined in an early Commission meeting:

**Priority:** Deterring sexual harassment and sexual misconduct. Laity must be included in this discussion, now focused primarily on clergy.

**Priority:** Providing resources for annual conferences to:

- Activate and stimulate inactive annual conference commissions,
- Encourage the use of ecumenical resources that are already available,
- Develop a monitoring instrument that can be used in all annual conferences.

**Priority:** Monitoring seminaries, theological schools, and general boards and agencies, the Commission would train annual conferences to do monitoring within their conferences, and

- Follow closely the impact of the Judicial Council ruling striking down the one-third clergy, one-third laywomen and one-third laymen ratio to determine membership on conference boards and agencies.

**Priority:** Facilitating communication and interpretation of the Commission and its work.

Several events outside of the Commission's meetings

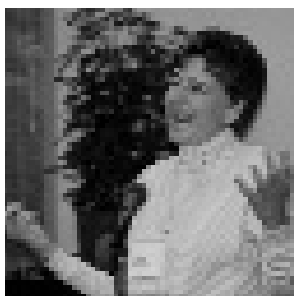
and stated goals impacted its work as the quadrennium began. In November 1992, voters in Colorado passed an amendment to the state Constitution that overturned existing local ordinances which had banned discrimination based on sexual orientation. The amendment also prevents any future adoption of anti-discrimination legislation based on sexual orientation. Because the 1996 General Conference was scheduled for Denver, the Commission requested the relocation of the General Conference and that all possible efforts be made to give voice to the gay and lesbian communities during the conference session. When the General Conference committee refused to move the conference, the Commission worked throughout the quadrennium to give visibility to the issue of equal rights and nondiscrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Another outside event impacting the work and focus of the Commission was an ecumenical assembly held in Minneapolis in November 1993, called the Re-imagining Conference. Reaction to that conference reverberated throughout the United Methodist Church and other mainline denominations. The heart of the

controversy was the use of the concept of *Sophia* (the Greek word for "God's wisdom," which is a feminine word also used to describe God's "Holy Spirit") and prayers to *Sophia* in the worship experiences. A vision of what a global gathering of conscientious, serious Christian women, sharing equally in worship, liturgy, theological reflections and prayer would look like also threatened many in United States mainline churches.

The Commission affirmed a statement drafted by its own members who attended the Re-imagining Conference, describing the event in laudatory terms. It also affirmed the participation in the event of the Women's Division, which came under blistering attack from the Good News Caucus. The statement of the Commission read, in part: "The roster of speakers reads like a 'who's who' in the emerging world of womanist/feminist scholars who shared their biblical and theological understandings of God. It saddens those of us who rejoice in the diverse expressions of faith, culture and God when other voices misunderstand and misrepresent such a unifying gathering. We affirm the right and gift of women to gather, to reflect, to name, to receive, and to share with each other, the church and the world the fullness of our Christian faith." (February 1994)

Reaction to the Re-imagining Conference, used as a springboard for criticism by right-leaning church groups, continued throughout the quadrennium, shadowing work on feminist theology and inclusive language by the Commission and others in the church.



Janet Wolf, an ordained elder in the Tennessee Conference, preaches at first Woman's Congress (1999).

The Council of Bishops chose not to make a direct response to the agitation. Instead, they submitted a document to the church for discussion titled "Biblical Wisdom and Current Theological Ferment." (Council of Bishops, Oct. 31-Nov. 4, 1994)

While the document is a cogent discussion of the role of wisdom literature and tradition in the church, and while there is support for feminist theology and a nonanthropomorphic God, there is little evidence that the document quieted the criticism directed at the Women's Division, the Commission and others who worked in the area of language and imagery for God and on feminist theology.

The Commission entered the new quadrennium with a sense of urgency to better communicate its work to the denomination and beyond. In response to this need, the Interpretation Group was created in February 1993. The group began its work by suggesting to the entire Commission that it consider developing a resource packet for local churches on its work, creating a video to tell its story, being more intentional about work with media, using meeting sites to make contact with local church and conference commissions,

emphasizing the local connection and continuing work on sexual misconduct and harassment issues.

At the beginning of the quadrennium, a joint task force on Racism and Sexism was created by the Commission in partnership with the General Commission on Religion and Race. The task force was created in response to the concerns of women of color about the effects of racism and sexism in their lives. A survey completed in the fall of 1995 reported that racial/ethnic clergywomen experienced a cumulative effect of oppression, alienation and discrimination.

The survey was designed to gather written narratives. Of the five hundred eighteen surveys mailed, one hundred twelve were returned. While many respondents indicated that they were enjoying their appointments and had been accepted by the congregations they served, others were rejected before they were given a chance to do their jobs. Racist and sexist jokes were common. Many felt that they were expected to assimilate into the dominant culture. Worship and preaching styles, language, music, personal appearance and leadership abilities were all called into question. Many felt they had to prove themselves over and over, and that they were treated in a condescending fashion.

The data and stories gathered comprise significant information for ongoing work on racism/sexism, and an argument for continuing the joint task force.

An oral history, as part of a larger history project sponsored by the Commission, culminated in an

exchange of personal recollections and memories during a daylong conversation in March 1995 at Scarritt-Bennett Center, Nashville. Participants included past and present members of the General Secretariat: Nancy Grissom Self, Kiyoko Kasai Fujiu, Trudie Kibbe Reed, Geneva Harton Dalton, Cecelia M. Long and Stephanie Anna Hixon. Past presidents present were Barbara Ricks Thompson and Carolyn Henninger Oehler.

The Commission, along with the other general agencies of the church, faced the possibility of the restructuring of the general church. The new structure might include a smaller Commission and/or the merging of the Commission into a larger monitoring group or into an arm of a program group. Commission members raised concerns about maintaining the work and functions of the Commission in any restructuring. One of the core values they affirmed was full inclusiveness, declaring that this value must be at the heart of the church's life. Advocacy and monitoring need to be continued, they affirmed, and the General Secretariat model is worth preserving as a way of doing the work and as a model for others to follow.

Commission members assessed their work in this quadrennium, in light of their self-proclaimed positive showing at the 1996 General Conference.

Accomplishments included:

- Partnership and leadership with annual conferences in response to 1992 resolution on sexual harassment.
- A resource packet on dealing with sexual harassment was sent to annual conference commissions.
- A study guide, *Rock, Shepherd, Friend*, on inclusive images for God, was completed.
- An interfaith teleconference on combating sexual harassment, "Healing Broken Lives and Communities," was held on May 10, 1994. The conference focused on the issues of sexual abuse and misconduct by clergy and lay professionals.
- Listening events, during which local folks and agencies interacted with Commission members, rated high in the assessment of the annual conference work group. Local commission chairs attended General Commission meetings in their areas.
- Networking was a continuing focus. It included linking annual conference commission chairs with a General Commission member, and jurisdictional conference calls among conference commission chairs and General Commission members.
- Work of the Racism/Sexism Task Force

which surveyed racial/ethnic clergywomen, was viewed as crucial to the work of the monitoring work group.

- An updated annual conference packet for monitoring in final stages of preparation.
- The monitoring committee visited one general agency, the General Board of Church and Society, during the quadrennium.

Setting goals and priorities as a Commission provided valuable direction for the work of the Commission and its staff. The use of contracted staff and consultants helped to meet goals, and was affirmed. The monitoring function at the 1996 General Conference was successful and had an impact on the conference.

The Commission told the 1996 General Conference that the church has "made significant progress in recognizing, respecting and appreciating the gifts of women. At the same time, there is still much more to be done, and [the Commission] has been charged with helping this process to continue." In the gap between work accomplished and work still to be done, the Commission found its agenda for the new quadrennium.

Smaller by five persons (forty-eight to forty-three), the Commission set goals for the next four years of work. They included continuing to develop resources to equip annual conferences to work in areas of concern to the Commission, increasing subscriptions to *The Flyer* and continuing participation in the Joint Task Force on Racism/Sexism with the General Commission on Religion and Race. Monitoring activities would also include a study of clergywomen's salaries and monitoring two general agencies, with special attention to restructuring issues and sexual harassment. Other goals stated the intention to gather information about Promise Keepers, to form a task force on clergy spouse concerns, and to evaluate the image of the Commission.

Elected leadership of the Commission were Joyce Waldon Bright, president; Taka Ishii, vice president; and Charlotte Fitzsimmons, secretary. Cecelia M. Long and Stephanie Anna Hixon comprised the General Secretariat.

The quadrennium began with three more women bishops, elected at the 1996 Jurisdictional Conferences. When asked about challenges the church faces to achieve equal responsibility and participation of women, Bishop Susan Hassinger (Northeastern Jurisdiction) noted that churches still don't fully value laywomen. They continue to fill primarily nurturing roles, she said, with less opportunity for spiritual leadership and financial and property leadership. Men provide key administrative leadership in the midst of their declining participation in the whole life of the church, the bishop





A sign language interpreter, right, chats with a participant in the 1999 Women's Congress. Inclusion and full participation of all women in all circumstances is central to GCSRW's mission.

observed.

In looking at the effect of raising awareness on clergy sexual misconduct, Hassinger said she was saddened to see how many persons still don't get it. Understanding the power dynamics seems to be particularly difficult, she observed.

Bishop Janice Riggle Huie (South Central Jurisdiction) expressed concern about the support of women called to ministry. There are large portions of the culture in which it is still not acceptable for a woman to be a pastor. Therefore, the call to ministry for many women lies below the surface and does not get explored, she noted.

Sexism and racism concerned Bishop Charlene Kammerer (Southeast Jurisdiction). "It is a challenge for seminarians, both men and women, to realize that while they regard issues of sexism in the church as being behind us, in fact, sexism in the church continues. Overcoming the sin of racism in our church is very much before us," the bishop observed. "We seem to have resurgent racism in the church and the world. We must deal with it now!"

Eleven women bishops had been elected by 1996; one was deceased and one retired.

"*Women's Congress: A Spiritual Journey*" received attention and resources from the Commission throughout the quadrennium, in preparation for the April 1999 event. The gathering was designed to identify and empower potential women leaders. During a visioning process the previous quadrennium, members discerned that the denomination needed a great gathering of women who would engage in personal and spiritual renewal and growth. Participants would be expected to return to churches and communities ready to exercise leadership there. Ethel Johnson, a well-respected educator and laywoman, was the coordinator of the congress. The congress was deemed a success, with one hundred fifty women gathered to be encouraged in their spiritual journeys and leadership skills.

Jurisdictional conference calls were organized and led by Commission members during the fall of 1997. The calls were an opportunity for chairpersons and staff of annual conference commissions on the status and role of women to share questions, ideas and concerns with one another and with Commission members and staff. The program of Promise Keepers and its influence on men was a concern among the participants. The restructuring that annual conferences were doing also was a concern. Annual conferences needed to be challenged to keep women's concerns before them as conferences combine functions and identities, the Commission urged.

RIGHT: "Sexism has taken on a different form, but it's still here ... We are finding that the cries from women and men to help the church to be what it's supposed to be are still there."

—**Cecelia M. Long**, right, with Stephanie Anna Hixon, GCSRW general secretariat, 1989-2001.

An emerging area of programming for annual conference commissions was identified on the calls — mentoring girls and young women. Issues covered by these kinds of programs include attention to the loss of personal power most girls experience when they reach adolescence and issues of gender diversity.

Sexual harassment issues and sexual misconduct continue to demand attention in annual conference commissions. There was a general concern about women clergy leaving local church settings and the disparity in male and female clergy salaries. And, some annual conference commissions feel called to be the voice to all women, regardless of race, class or sexual orientation, in spite of the pressure not to deal with sexual orientation.

The calls were held twice a year in each jurisdiction during the quadrennium.

At the final commission meeting in February 2000, members named the values that had shaped the Commission and its work during that quadrennium. A summary below includes four primary values with amplification of each.



- **We value women** — the full inclusion of women, especially those who are marginalized by society and by the church.
- **We value the role of women as leaders in the United Methodist Church**, advocating for the full participation of women, and providing training so that new leadership can emerge.
- **We value our life together as a Commission**, as we try to model an inclusive community, one of acceptance and honest sharing in a safe environment.
- **We value honest evaluation of our work**, as we struggle to be fully inclusive, to concentrate on lay as well as clergywomen's issues, and as we try to resist institutional preservation for its own sake.

These four groups of values reflect a deeply ingrained hopefulness, in the midst of an ongoing agenda that is heavy with hopelessness — largely unchecked sexual harassment in church settings and among church professionals, the intractability of racism, sexism, classism and heterosexism,

and the gathering clouds over the future of the United Methodist Church itself, to name some concerns that were picked up in the Commission's discussion of values.

Heading into the 2000 General Conference, the Commission continued to struggle with the church's exclusionary position on homosexual persons. At its September 1999 meeting, the Commission heard a report from a Commission member who had attended the spring 1999 meeting of the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns (GCCUIC). She shared a statement the GCCUIC had adopted to guide their own work. This statement, "Toward Greater Hospitality," was in response to the October 1998 Judicial Council Decision barring the GCCUIC from being a reconciling commission.

In a similar spirit, the Commission adopted a mission statement to guide its internal life and work. The statement is titled, "God's Inclusive Grace."

### **Preamble**

*The scriptures reveal to us a picture of a God who loves and cares for all people. This vision of God is further revealed in Isaiah: "for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Thus says the Lord God who gathers the outcasts of Israel. I will gather yet others" (Isaiah 56: 7b-8). Jesus Christ invited us to bring the Good News of God's grace and compassion to everyone. Christ reminds us of the breadth and depth of God's grace and mercy encompassing all women and men and children. Christ invites all*

RIGHT: —By 2000, fourteen United Methodist clergywomen had risen to the ranks of bishop, including: (left to right, back row) Beverly Shamana, Susan Hassinger, Ann Sherer, Charlene Kammerer, Sharon Rader, Linda Lee, Mary Ann Swenson, (front row) Sharon Brown Christopher, Janice Riggle Huie, Susan Morrison, Leontine Kelly, Judith Craig, and Violet Fisher. The first UM female bishop, Marjorie Matthews, was elected in 1980 and served the Wisconsin Area until retirement in 1984. She died in 1986.) The Council of Bishops includes 50 active bishops from the United States, 17 from outside the United States, and 68 who are retired.  
—UMNS Photo by J. David Miller

and includes all in his message of God's grace.

*The very nature of the Good News of Jesus Christ is inclusive. The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women believes that we truly honor God and celebrate the presence of Christ in and among us when we provide and promote compassion, intercession and ministry to and for all of our sisters and brothers.*

### **Resolution**

*Whereas, "[t]he primary purpose of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women shall be to challenge The United Methodist Church, including its general agencies, institutions, and connectional structures, to a continuing commitment to the full and equal responsibility and participation of women in the total life and mission of the Church, sharing fully in the power and in the policy-making at all levels of the Church's life. Such commitment will confirm anew recognition of the fact that The United Methodist Church is part of the universal church, rooted in the liberating message of Jesus Christ, that recognizes every person, woman or man, as a full and equal part of God's human family." (Par. 2102, 1996 Book of Discipline);*

*Whereas, "[h]omosexual persons no less than heterosexual persons are individuals of sacred worth. All persons need the ministry and guidance of the church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well*





"While [some seminary students] regard issues of sexism in the church as being behind us, in fact, sexism in the church continues."

—**Charlene Kammerer**,  
elected bishop in 1996,  
now episcopal leader of the  
Virginia Area.

*as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, with self." (Par. 65G, 1996 Book of Discipline); and Whereas, the members of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women hold diverse opinions on the issues of homosexuality in relation to Christian teaching, yet are committed to seeking areas of agreement,*

*Therefore be it resolved:*

*That the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women commits itself to a message of grace available to all persons, a ministry of Christlike hospitality, and a vision of inclusiveness through continued openness to the full participation of all people, which includes gay men and lesbians, indeed all marginalized persons, in its life and work, encouraging mutual respect, inclusive dialogue and growth in compassion. (Sept. 25, 1999)*

In preparation for General Conference 2000, the Commission conducted its quadrennial assessment of women's leadership in the United Methodist Church. This time, the survey was done by telephone, rather than in writing. One hundred twenty-six out of two hundred listed churches responded to the calls. Some of the findings were:

- Forty-five percent of the churches

have all men

ushers; twenty-two percent have all or mostly women ushers.

- Of churches with male pastors, seventy-seven percent had no clergywomen preaching in the past year. If lay liturgists were used, thirty-five percent used all or mostly males; thirty-nine percent used all or mostly females.
- In language for God, eighty percent of these churches used all or mostly all male language for God. In language for people, about sixty-five percent use inclusive terms. Fully inclusive language was used by three percent of the churches at all times.
- Women filled roles of leadership most frequently in these committees: education, staff-parish relations, worship, administrative councils/boards and evangelism/witness/outreach. Least inclusion of women was in finance, treasurer, missions and trustees.
- The most common responses on issues important to women were missions, church growth and children. Then, according to the pastors responding, came family and parenting, domestic

violence and aging.

- Although the 1996 General Conference mandated that each annual conference and local church adopt a sexual harassment policy, only forty-one percent have a policy in place. This is double the number in 1995, when the previous survey was done, but short of the General Conference mandate.

At the conclusion of this quadrennium, the Commission was asked to provide a self-evaluation to the General Council on ministries.

Their ministry visions included:

- To insure the church's ongoing commitment to the full and equal responsibility and participation of women in every expression of United Methodist life and ministry.
- Providing networking opportunities and linkages for women throughout the church which will enable and support an invigorated ministry of the church toward making disciples.
- Providing resources which equip individuals to be flexible, to relate to persons from diverse backgrounds and to enhance skills to be used in a

variety of settings for transformational ministries.

- Developing theological resources which will enhance the spiritual development of lay and clergy leaders in the church to better understand ways in which scripture and tradition have at times been barriers to eradicating violence against women. United Methodists throughout the world have requested resources pertaining to women in their specific cultural contexts.
- The Commission has worked toward making real the vision of fostering accountability through covenant relationships among persons throughout the world, to the end that full participation and value of women may be honored in our United Methodist witness.
- The Commission will continue to work cooperatively with other general agencies and annual conference leaders to make the greatest impact with the resources available to the denomination.

Thus, the Commission ended this four years of worked still envisioning an impact on annual conferences, the general church and throughout the world, while acknowledging that tight resources and limited time make these visions rather than full realities.

Three women were elected bishops in 2000. That they are all African-American women marks the achievement of hard work by many toward a more



Musician and recording artist Cynthia Wilson, today an ordained United Methodist deacon, leads worship during the first Women's Congress, sponsored by the Commission in spring 1999.

racially and gender-inclusive Council of Bishops.

When asked what particular challenges clergywomen face in the United Methodist Church today, Bishop Linda Lee (North Central Jurisdiction) responded: "I believe we still need to overcome resistance to women in leadership. That resistance stems from some of the earliest time in the history of church and culture. There was a time in the history of the world when women were recognized and respected as leaders, not considered less than men. About the time Israelite history began, the culture was making a shift from matriarchal societies to patriarchal society. Today we are still living in the residue of that shift.

"People have deep beliefs that there are certain things women cannot or should not do. Women live a different kind of cycle than men. Their approach is different, but not deficient, yet the culture still tends to treat women as deficient," Lee noted.

Bishop Beverly Shamana (Western Jurisdiction) was asked about the challenges ahead of the church as it moves toward the full and equal participation and responsibility of women. "We are challenged to prepare and train churches to receive

women pastors with grace and affirmation," the bishop replied. "Women bring a relational component to leadership that is different than men's leadership has been. Issues around the transition from male to female leadership, family concerns, preaching style, different priorities, male spouses, family configuration, single parenting and a host of other situations must be on the table if we want to keep women in local church leadership and make it a rewarding experience for women and the church," she said.

When asked the question about challenges that clergywomen face in the church today, Bishop Violet Fisher (Northeastern Jurisdiction) noted that women's salaries must be raised to the level of their male counterparts. "Too often," she observed, "much too often, clergywomen are appointed to smaller churches, appointed as associates or appointed in rural, urban or small towns, while our brothers are appointed to the biggest, best and wealthiest congregations.

"Lastly," said the bishop, "too many women in the United Methodist Church still experience the stained-glass ceiling. The church needs to continue to address this problem. We must have a place at the table for all of us, especially women, both lay and clergy. We need to continue to educate, to dialogue, to raise awareness, as often as we can. We cannot rest until there is no longer a glass ceiling for our sisters, our mothers, our daughters, our granddaughters and our nieces."

(Interviews with Bishops Lee, Shamana and Fisher taken



## 2000-2004: JOINING THE DANCE IN GOD BEGUN

from *The Flyer*, Winter 2000-2001 and Spring 2001)

In the fall of 2000, the Commission reorganized in the shadow of a General Conference that had established a mixed record on supporting and including women in the church. As *The Flyer* observed following the conference, "...[A]ny celebration of the 2000 General Conference must be tempered with the recognition that women stand to lose some hard-won ground along our journey toward full and equal participation. Votes on the status of our homosexual sisters continued the church's history of exclusion. The decision to change the formula for determining General Conference representation threatens to reduce the proportion of women elected as delegates to the next quadrennial meeting. The male-dominated body voted to restrict a woman's right to make medical choices about her own body during pregnancy. ... (Of the nine hundred ninety-two total delegates, three hundred fifty-nine, or thirty-six percent, are women.)" (*The Flyer*, Summer 2000)

The Commission elected Gail Murphy-Geiss, president; Rose Arroyo, vice president; and William Wilson, secretary. Commission members chose Constituents, Advocacy, Resource and Education (CARE) or Research and Monitoring (RAM) committees in which to do their work for the quadrennium. Cecelia M. Long and Stephanie Anna Hixon were the Secretariat as the quadrennium began. The Commission





"We cannot rest until there is no longer a glass ceiling for our sisters, our mothers, our daughters, our granddaughters and our nieces"

—**Violet Fisher**, elected bishop in 2000, now episcopal leader of the New York West Area

re-nominated Long, knowing that she would complete her twelve-year term limit at the end of 2000. Long left the employ of the Commission at the end of 2001.

In addition to bringing a new Commission membership on board, the Commission was facing growing financial pressures, which resulted in deciding to meet once a year instead of meeting both spring and fall, which had been the pattern. The Commission also faced a transition to a new General Secretariat, as both Cecelia and Stephanie were completing their allowed tenure of twelve years.

In reflecting on her thirteen years with the Commission, Cecelia M. Long found that women were more often included in decision-making settings in the church than they were when she began her work with the Commission. "Our training style has caused folks to expect high-quality material based on spiritual depth. I am absolutely convinced that to bring about God's kingdom, we have to honor and respect our Biblical traditions. This notion is not new for the Commission, but many of our detractors have ignored our commitment to authentic Biblical and spiritual depth," she said.

"The church continues to misunderstand the intersection of racism and sexism," Long said. "It does not recognize that women of color continue to struggle against two barriers: the racism generated by their color and the sexism generated by their gender. Moreover", Long affirmed, "the church does not validate the perspective of women of color, whether clergy or lay." She pointed out that in her experience, "we invite women of color to the table, but we do not listen to what they say."

Long noted that the use of inclusive language for God and persons continues to be a challenge for the church at all levels. "Until we expand our language, we will continue to shape our children's thinking in limited ways," she said.

Above all, she reminded all women, "We must stay vigilant. We have to watch what happens and speak truthfully about what we see, hear and experience." (Interview with Cecelia Long excerpted from *The Flyer*, Winter 2002).

Raponzil "Ra" Drake and Soomee Kim were nominated to the General Secretariat in September 2002. The selection of these two clergywomen created a new situation in the General Secretariat: the first time it was comprised of only clergy and only racial/ethnic women.

Drake and Kim served in their positions for one year and were not re-nominated by the Commission for another term. "It was a sad, difficult decision," said Gail

Murphy-Geiss, president of the Commission at the time. M. Garlinda Burton assumed the position of interim General Secretary on Nov. 1, 2003. She was subsequently named General Secretary in the fall of 2004.

Tight finances forced the Commission to go to a single General Secretary, eliminating the shared-leadership model that the Commission had used since its beginning. The support staff configuration was redesigned to enable additional program support.

Central conference clergywomen from the Philippines, Nigeria, Angola and Estonia attended the September 2002 meeting, to discuss the status and role of women in their countries. This emphasis underscored the Commission's approach to including Central Conference women in their work and concerns. Consideration of Central Conference issues for women has been limited by the Commission's lack of financial and staff resources.

Throughout this quadrennium, the work of the Commission went on, in the midst of questions and pressures. A website was developed and launched during this quadrennium. Work continued on sexual harassment and misconduct issues. Forty-

three annual conferences sent representatives to a July 19-22, 2001, "Team Member Training for Annual Conference Response Teams" conference, sharing resources and training related to congregational care following incidents of clergy or ministerial misconduct of a sexual nature. Attendees from this co-sponsored event with the Rocky Mountain Annual Conference, nominated and formed a coordinating team to assist GCSRW in its continuing efforts to reflect, resource and strategize helpful and healing ways of prevention, intervention, education and transformation around the issues of ministerial misconduct of a sexual nature. Clergy spouses and families were the focus of a working group planning a gathering to address such topics as lack of a support structure for clergy spouses and families, lesbian ministers' fear of losing their appointments, parsonage concerns, equitable salaries and conflict management.

The Commission established the Advocacy for Women Endowment Fund in 2002, to provide monies for emerging ministries related to advocacy for women. The Commission was seeking other sources of funds besides World Service, which was not providing the funds needed to run the Commission's full agenda.

Monitoring activity continued, with visits to Perkins, Wesley, Gammon, Drew, Saint Paul and United seminaries. Desk audits, to monitor gender and racial inclusiveness, were requested of all general agencies, in cooperation with the General Commission on Religion and Race. The quadrennial local church survey was



"I know, my sisters, it is not easy even now. The cold stares of the world have not stopped. The struggle continues, but God is still in charge and has the last word."

—**Minerva Carcaño**,  
clergywoman, speaking  
to the 2002 International  
clergywomen's consultation.  
She was elected bishop  
in 2004.

conducted during 2003.

In preparation for General Conference 2004, the Commission expressed a concern for expansive biblical language for God, Holy Trinity and humanity. The work of a Commission task force resulted in a petition on expansive biblical language. "Following the example of Jesus, who used many ways for naming God, the Church must model in its language, especially in worship, expansive metaphors, for speaking of God, the Trinity, and humanity," the resolution reads in part.

Following directions from the General Council on Finance and Administration, the Commission conducted preliminary discussions with the General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR) on a possible merger. As a result of these discussions, the Commission submitted a petition to the General Conference requesting that their own commission and GCORR plan for uniting into a single agency, a Council on Inclusiveness. In its rationale, the petition cited instances of discrimination that include both gender and race. A single agency would be better equipped to call the church to full inclusiveness, it argued.

After the petition was submitted to the General Conference, the General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR) raised concerns about creating one agency. They were not in favor of joining the two Commissions at this time. GCORR argued that a single advocacy commission would weaken the impact and work of both agencies. On further consideration, the Commission decided not to support its own petition in the legislative process, and worked with GCORR to develop a statement that would clarify the confusing positions and support the continuance of the two Commissions.

The challenges of these four years were some of the greatest the Commission had faced since its organization. They were centered in the changes in the office of the General Secretariat, and claimed much time, energy and resources from the entire Commission. Significant work was done on clergy spouse issues and in cooperation with GCORR. Work on sexual harassment issues and comprehensive monitoring continued, with valuable information being collected from local, annual conference and general church levels. Financial concerns hovered over the work and resulted in reducing the General Secretariat from two to one person in the final year of the quadrennium.

This quadrennium concluded with the election of six women to the office of bishop, including the first Latina bishop. The bishops are Hope Morgan Ward, Deborah Kiesey, Jane Middleton, Mary Virginia Taylor, Sally Dyck and Minerva Carcaño.

Since Marjorie Matthews was elected in 1980, the church has elected twenty women to the episcopacy. During the 2005-2008 quadrennium, fifteen women will serve as active and four as retired bishops. Matthews died in 1986.

### A SEASON OF CHANGE

Throughout these twelve years, a number of threads ran throughout the Commission's work. There has been continuing work and monitoring in the area of **racism and sexism**. This includes the efforts of the joint task force with GCORR, a survey of ethnic-minority clergywomen and personal stories of the intersection of the two "isms." The Commission continues to realize how inextricably linked these two oppressions are.

In an interview with *The Flyer* in the spring of 1999, Barbara Ricks Thompson, then recently retired as General Secretary of the General Commission on Religion and Race, said of the intersection of racism and sexism in the church: "I believe there is a need to more forthrightly address the issues of racism and sexism. Our church is becoming more multiculturally diverse. ... So the challenge increases in magnitude."

FLYER: *How do we meet these increasing challenges?*

Thompson: "One way is to keep plugging away at the systemic and institutional manifestations of racism and sexism. People do not really understand that the sins of racism and sexism are embedded in the systems and institutions of church and society. ... The ministry of these two agencies [The Commission on the Status and Role of Women and The Commission on Religion and Race] has helped the church to move forward, but there is still a great distance to go in achieving the multicultural community of faith I believe God wants us to be." (*The Flyer*, Spring/Summer 1999)

Conflicting ideas on the best and most effective **structure** surfaced throughout these three quadrennia. The pressures of the general church on the Commission to find its ideal structure made structural issues a continuing agenda item. The Commission was reduced in size during this time, both the Secretariat and membership. And there was the aborted effort to unite the Commission with GCORR, attempted by the Commission before the 2004 General Conference. Although GCORR was not ready for such conversations, financial pressures continue to keep this option alive for both commissions.

Particularly during the 2000-2004 quadrennium, **leadership** issues challenged the Commission's ability to address its agenda. Two longtime leaders left because they reached or exceeded their twelve-year term limits. Cecelia M. Long and Stephanie Anna Hixon had been



"A woman standing affirmed as God's valued daughter can face myriad struggle with strength and courage."

—**Stephanie Anna Hixon**, member of the GCSRW general secretariat (1991-2002)

key figures in the success and accomplishments of the Commission during their years with the Commission. Their replacements were with the Commission only one year, and all of the work and expense to bring them into the work of the Commission was lost when they left. A single General Secretary now leads the agency, a sign of the financial stresses the Commission is under. The General Secretariat model, so vital to the early Commission as a sign of a new leadership model, is no more.

Some of the most evident work on reducing **sexual harassment** in the United Methodist Church was accomplished at the general level, as bishops and other general agencies developed and implemented policies against such behavior. However, local churches, especially small and rural churches, resist acknowledging that sexual harassment could occur in their churches. The tough work of raising consciousness in the majority of local churches remains.

Throughout, concerns about the health and viability of **annual conference commissions** have been a prominent concern. Jurisdictional conference calls, resources for a wide range of annual

conference needs and conference-focused training events have helped to strengthen these commissions. At the same time, they are continually vulnerable to annual conference restructuring and financial retrenchment. They often suffer from lack of leadership. Concerns of women do not have a high priority in many annual conference settings.

Central to the Commission's mandate is the **inclusion of women** in the life of the church at all levels. Its inability to advocate for lesbian women and to include their concerns in monitoring efforts because of the exclusive position of the church has created a struggle to be true to its mandate and to still follow the directives of the church. These are in continuing conflict. The Commission is one of the crucibles in the church where this dissonance is lived out. The entire church lives with this tension, made very real in an agency whose job is to advocate for all women in the church.

Concerns remain related to the **status of clergywomen**. Whether it's pay or the quality of appointments, women lag behind men with comparable experience. Possibly, the high incidence of sexual harassment of clergywomen by their male colleagues is related to the devaluing of clergywomen by the system that should be protecting and supporting them.

There has been a rich collection of data available to the Commission from its quadrennial surveys of the **participation of laywomen** in local church leadership. From the first survey results to the most recent one,



"I am elated to see young women and women of color claiming their place as leaders in the church and the world. We will not stop until this denomination becomes a Christ-fired movement in which all women and girls can serve without barriers."  
—**M. Garlinda Burton**,  
*elected GCSRW general secretary in 2004.*

there is evidence that women continue to be channeled into stereotypical "women's work" in local churches. Even in the face of falling numbers of men as participants in local churches, they continue to hold on to leadership positions in financial, trustees and administrative committees.

Perhaps the most consistent activity of the Commission has been its **monitoring** activities. At every level of the church — seminaries, general agencies, local churches — the Commission has raised issues of inclusiveness and called for valuing the participation of women. There are many successes to point to through this monitoring, particularly in seminaries.

The needs and gifts of **Central Conference women** have been added to the agenda of the Commission during these years. The Commission has made initial attempts to include these in their already full agenda.

The work of the Commission is largely unseen and unappreciated, especially in annual conferences and local churches. Too often, when the Commission is recognized, it is as pushing a radical, feminist agenda, rather than working in tandem with churches to become fully inclusive of

women and their concerns. How the Commission can be better understood and received by the church at all levels is an ongoing discussion in the Commission. As a result, **communication and interpretation functions** have received increasing attention in these later quadrennia.

At the General Church level, it is a challenge for this smallest general agency to respond to all of the requests for information and **justification of its existence**. World Service funding that does not keep up with needs challenges the Commission to fulfill its general church-given mandates with a smaller staff, a smaller Commission and less support from the general church.

Progress on the use of **inclusive language** for God and persons has slowed, even halted. A 2000 survey of local churches revealed that eighty percent of the churches surveyed used male language for God. Preference for a male God seems to be related to women being less valued as clergywomen and relegated to stereotypical laywomen's work in local churches.

### ASSESSING THREE DECADES

Thirty-two years is not a long time. The struggle of women and people of color for an equal opportunity for leadership and service within the church must be measured in hundreds of years, not in decades. And yet the years from 1972 to 2004 were times of ferment and change within the United Methodist Church and in the



Women continue to be channeled into "women's work" in local churches. Men continue to hold onto leadership positions in financial, trustees and administrative committees.

*—Findings from the local church survey, conducted by the Commission in 2003.*

U.S. society at large.

The forces that gathered in the 1960s to give birth to the Commission on the Status and Role of Women found energy in a dynamic civil rights movement and a resurgent women's movement. The church was late in responding to these movements. And when the General Conference created the Commission on the Status and Role of Women in 1972, it seemed as much an effort to compartmentalize the concerns of women as it did an acknowledgment of their legitimate grievances and desires for change.

The small group of women and men elected to the first Commission were committed to doing a new thing from the moment they gathered to elect officers and design an agenda. And from that small group has grown a force for change and a measuring stick of the church's accountability to the inclusiveness it preaches but too often fails to live.

The Commission's gifts to the church are many:

- Worship as a centering and nurturing act
- Women respected as authoritative leaders – lay, clergy, seminary faculty, bishops, staff members
- A continuing spotlight on the linkage

between racism and sexism, and between homophobia and sexism

- A staffing style that offers options and challenges hierarchical assumptions
- Leadership elected based on commitment to gender and racial/ethnic inclusiveness
- Consensus decision-making as a means to empower and develop community
- Courage in the face of attacks and hatred, whether for championing inclusive language or studying homophobia
- Mutuality in relationships between women and men
- Listening to voices from the institutional margins

The Commission's very existence has been a light of hope to women struggling with isolation, sexual harassment, and sexist and racist systems within the church. The Commission's advocacy for women, as individuals and as groups, has been one of its most stellar contributions. The consultation of clergywomen originated from its work. Agencies and institutions of the church now have plans for including women as well as grievance procedures to deal with problems. Sexual harassment is being addressed, although there is still much work to be done to eradicate these behaviors and have their consequences taken seriously.

Certainly those women and men who have been members and staff of the Commission during these three

A more conservative United Methodist Church in a conservative U.S. social and cultural setting leaves less room for women's concerns and values. One Commission member wrote to his colleagues in 2001: "This is such a crucial time in our denomination's history for [the Commission]. Please don't step back from your prophetic role of holding the church to what it says it believes, full inclusion of all." Much was accomplished in the first thirty years. Much remains to be done, if the United Methodist Church is to become a church that fully includes and values women.

—**Carolyn Henninger Oehler**, Dec. 31, 2005.

decades have had their lives changed through their association. Another study will be needed to chronicle their journeys after they left the Commission. Yet it is safe to say that many, including this writer, were empowered and strengthened in their Christian faith and in their faith in the ability of committed people to make changes in a church that too often seems to have lost its vision and its hearing.

We've journeyed a long way from the 1968-1970 Study Commission that counted heads to advocating for recognition of women's gifts and skills after they are in the room, on the committee, or a member of the faculty or staff. We've journeyed from early efforts to include women within existing systems to directly addressing their systematic exclusion. The struggle has moved to a deeper level of the church and to deeper levels of the human spirit. Inclusion of women has come to mean also respect for women's ideas, theologies, contributions, bodies and ways of being.

At times the Commission underestimated the force of the status quo and the determination of those working to maintain hierarchical power structures and gender relationships. And the struggle

continues to survive in the church's bureaucracy and still maintain a prophetic and inclusive posture. And yet the goals and accomplishments of the Commission show that the vision of that first group is alive and dynamic.

The Commission's life itself has been both a model for and a sacrifice to the church about ways in which we can live lives together that are respectful and affirming and inclusive. The Commission reminds the church that God continues to do something new in the midst of the old, and that the yearning for justice and community that God has placed within the human heart can still power a movement to change lives and systems. The journey continues, nourished by what has been, sustained by what now is and guided by the vision of what yet can be.



**1973-1976  
COMMISSION MEMBERS**

**Executive Secretariat:**  
Judith Leaming-Elmer  
Nancy Grissom Self

Blackburn, Robert M.  
Branscomb, Louise  
Decker, Hazel  
DeWitt, Jesse R.  
Garrison, Benjamin  
Graves, Thomas  
Gray, P. Harold  
Grissom, Gwen  
Hagiya, Jan  
Handy, Doris  
Hartz, Mary Frances  
Henderson, Mattie  
Hieb, Dorothy  
Howell, H. Sharon  
Hosselyn, Lynne  
Kell, Marilyn Ammons  
Kirby, Ellen  
Majors, R. Powell  
Mann, Robert  
McCartney, Leah  
Melberg, Eliabeth  
Miller, Harriet  
Mizoguchi, Dwight  
Modisher, Donald  
Peck, David  
Perry, Bob  
Powers, Jeanne Audrey  
Saenz, Lydia M.  
Sample, Frederick  
Schwiebert, Erwin  
Spiller, Owsley  
Spruce, Susan  
Sugden, Roberta  
Temte, Myrna Gum  
Thompson, Barbara Ricks  
Troxell, Barbara  
Underwood, Sally  
Urquiza, Consuelo  
Valverde, Ernest  
Walters, George  
Ward, JoAnn  
White, Toni

**1977-1980  
COMMISSION MEMBERS**

**General Secretariat:**  
Kiyoko Kasai Fujii  
Trudie Kibbe Preciphs  
Nancy Grissom Self

Amico, Ellie  
Blinn, Elaine  
Bolander, Robert  
Branscomb, Louise  
Carpenter Jr, Robert B.  
Chu, Young Man  
Church, Gladys  
Dingman, Mary  
Gonzalez, Ondina  
Graves, Tom  
Handy, Doris  
Haught, Mable  
Heilman, Gerald  
Heilman, Geraldine  
Howell, H. Sharon  
Hurmence, Mary  
Josselyn, Lynne  
Kimbrought, Nelia  
Lovern, J. Chess  
Maeda, Sharon  
May, Mary  
New, Abraham  
Oehler, Carolyn  
Ortiz, Victor  
Palmer, Wesley  
Rivera de Velez, Rominita M.  
Robertson, Dixie  
Rutland, Randy  
Saenz, Lydia M.  
Santillan, Paul  
Schweibert, Erwin  
Shamana, Beverly  
Smith, Chiquita  
Spiller, Owsley  
Strong, Evelyn  
Thomason, Rose  
Thompson, Barbara Ricks  
Troxell, Barbara  
Vance, Linda  
Walters, George  
Wheatley, Melvin  
Winton, Euba Harris

Yemoto, Velma

**1981-1984  
COMMISSION MEMBERS**

**General Secretariat:**  
Kiyoko Kasai Fujii  
Nancy Grissom Self

Alejandro, Aurea  
Allen, Fred  
Amos, Bill  
Bass, Ressie Mae  
Bolander, Bob  
Campney, Arthur  
Catt, Steve  
Copeland, Bruce  
Dahl, Thomas  
Edmonds, Dayton  
Emery, Edna  
Everhart, Sharon  
Fishbeck Jr., Royal  
Gonzalez, Ondina  
Harris-Winton, Euba  
Heilman, Geraldine  
Hurmence, Mary  
Ioelu, Tpuni  
Kammerer, Charlene  
Kardos, James  
Kimbrough, Nelia  
Leach, Ted  
Lineberger, Pam Baker  
London, Harlan  
Ma, Lyndon Te  
McGilbray, Virginia  
Merrill, Josephine  
Nernandez, Nilda  
Oehler, Carolyn Henninger  
Oliver, Maria Fisher  
Paulson, Delbert  
Reed, Elizabeth  
Robertson, Dixie  
Russell, John  
Santillan, Paul  
Shamana, Beverly  
Smith, Chiquita  
Smith, James  
Southard, Naomi P.F.  
Steach, Ruth  
Stewart III, Charles H.

Strandberg, Karl  
Thompson, Alfred  
Valverde, Ernest  
Vining, Kenneth  
Walker, James  
Ward, Georgiana  
Wheatley, Melvin  
Willis Jr., Walter  
Witherspoon, Esther  
Yamasaki, Nancy  
Yemoto, Velma

**1985-1988  
COMMISSION MEMBERS**

**General Secretariat:**  
Geneva Harton Dalton  
Kiyoko Kasai Fujii  
Nancy Grissom Self

Amos, Bill  
Bass, Ressie Mae  
Black, Harrison  
Boo, Sung Lai  
Burkert, Kristan  
Carcaño, Minerva (resigned)  
Craig, Judith  
Dahl, Thomas  
Day, Randy  
Dickson, Marcus  
Duggan, Barry  
Edmonds, Dayton  
Emery, Edna  
Everett, Ruth  
Everhart, Sharon (resigned)  
Haase, Becky  
Hamlin, Joyce  
Harrington, Edwin (resigned)  
Hill, Judith  
Howell, H. Sharon  
Hudson, Laura Echols  
Ioelu, Tapuni  
John, Becky  
Kardos, Jim  
Laram, Charles  
Lineberger, Pamela Baker  
Maine, Arturo  
McGilbray, Virginia  
Meier, Wilma  
Mendenhall, Don

Misal, Margaret  
Mullette, Bill  
NeSmith, Sam  
Pennington, Jackie  
Phillips, Sam  
Plaud, Milca  
Pool, Joe  
Pruess-Jones, Bert  
Reed, Elizabeth  
Riddle, Barbara  
Rinehart, Joetta  
Santibanez, Ruby  
Schuman, Rey Valencia  
(resigned)  
Short, Mary Kercherval  
Spence, Elizabeth Lopez  
Steach, Ruth  
Stewart III, Charles H.  
(resigned)  
Stith, Forrest  
Thomas, Linda  
Thompson, Linda  
Thompson, Alfred  
Unger, Paul (resigned)  
Valverde, Ernest  
Ward, Georgiana  
Waterfield, Jim  
Witherspoon, Esther  
Yamasaki, Nancy

**1989-1992  
COMMISSION MEMBERS**

**General Secretariat:**  
Kiyoko Kasai Fujii  
Stephanie Anna Hixon  
Cecelia M. Long  
Nancy Grissom Self

Atha, Grayson  
Burkert, Kristan  
Book, Sun Lai (resigned)  
Cahoon, Pamela  
Chingman, John  
Cooley, Tobin  
Day, Randy  
Dickson, Marcus  
Edmond Jr, Holman  
Eidson, Ryan K.  
Eldredge, Fran

Finlayson-Schueler, Ted  
Goto, Courtney  
Gurtler, Barbara  
Haase, Becky  
Hill, Judith C.  
Hollis, Waymon  
Javier, Aquilino (Pong)  
Jefferson, Elaine  
Hatcher, Myrtle Johnson  
Liotta, Ellen Carter  
Long, Gary  
Loomis, Diana  
Maine, Arturo  
McGee, Winonah  
Mendenhall, Don  
Mullette, Bill  
NeSmith, Sam  
Phillips, Anita  
Pruess-Jones, Bert  
Rhee, S. Kwan  
Rivera, Marie  
Rinehart, Joetta  
Robbins, Penny  
Sarge, Pat  
Seifert, Lois  
Short, Mary Kercherval  
Silva, Tony  
Solomon, Dan  
Southard, Naomi P.F.  
Spain, Robert  
Spence, Elizabeth Lopez  
Tappan, Marion J.  
Thomas, Linda  
Titus, Margie  
Urbom, Warren  
Velez, Ana Andujar  
Wilkins, Craig  
Williams, Don  
Wood, Anita

**1993-1996  
COMMISSION MEMBERS**

**General Secretariat:**  
Stephanie Anna Hixon  
Cecelia Long

Abrams, Marvin  
Bashaw, Debra  
Brown, Beth

Campbell, John  
Carter, Ellen S.  
Cho, Esther  
Daniels, Sandra  
Dauway, Lois  
Eldredge, Fran  
Ernst, Sally  
Finlayson-Schueler, Ted  
Forrest, Martha  
Gonzalez, Cathy  
Grove-DeJarnett,  
Guidry, Francis E. W.  
Gurtler, Barbara  
Han, James  
Hatcher, Myrtle  
Hollis, Waymon  
Ishii, Takayuki  
Javior, Aquilino  
Kiesey, Deborah  
Long, Gary  
Loomis, Diana  
Maldonado, Efrain  
Martinez, Lydia Salazar  
Meadors, Jack  
Miles, JoAnn  
Ousley, Darlene Saunders  
Price, John  
Rivera, Maria  
Robinson, Phil  
Shepherd, Robert  
Silva, Antonio  
Smalley, Susan  
Stewart, Jason  
Tarver, Virginia  
Titus, Margie  
Vergheese, Annamma  
Williams, Don  
Wood, Anita  
Urbom, Warren  
Vernon, Elizabeth

**1997-2000  
COMMISSION MEMBERS**  
General Secretariat:  
Stephanie Anna Hixon  
Cecelia M. Long

Baker, Lynn  
Baumgardner, Karl

Briggs, Margie  
Brown, Beth  
Chai, Alice Yun  
Chattin, Terri Rae  
Coyner, Michael  
Dauway, Lois  
Fenn, Philip  
Ferguson, Phyllis  
Fitzsimons, Charlotte  
Forrest, Martha  
Grove-DeJarnett, Douglas  
Guidrey, Francis E. W.  
Han, James  
Harris, Sherman  
Hefley, Charles  
Huie, Janice Riggle  
Ishii, Takayuki  
Keels, Christine  
Liti, Seini  
Maldonado, Efrain  
McGee, Winonah  
Melvin, Mary  
Merrill, Laura  
Miller, Mark  
Ousley, Darlene Saunders  
Pearce, Mary Kathryn  
Rainier, Helen  
Rice, Mattie Mae  
Roberson, Martin  
Siaba, Marta  
Sterling, Green  
Turner, Molly  
Wright, Betty  
Wright, Elizabeth  
Yamamoto, Dean  
Youngblood, Rebecca

**2001-2004 Commission  
Members**  
General Secretariat:  
Raponzil Drake  
Stephanie Anna Hixon  
Soomee Kim  
Cecelia Long

Interim General Secretary:  
M. Garlinda Burton

Aguirre, Samuel

Attwood, Evelyn  
Briggs, Margie  
Collins, Janet  
Crawford, Christina  
Dauway, Lois  
Fitzsimons, Charlotte  
Frantz, Steve  
Frazier, Elizabeth  
Gates, Jim  
Gregory, Guinevere  
Guidry, Carolyn Tyler  
Hardeman, John  
Harris, Sherman  
Hefley, Charles  
Hopson, Cynthia Bond  
Hwang, Soo-Jung  
Jones, Norma Wall  
Kim, Haeran  
Martinez, Nanette  
Minnix, Michael  
Moseley, Annie  
Mull, Raquel  
Murillo, Sam  
Muse, Terry  
Oba, Gary  
Ough, Bruce  
Palomaria, Alex  
Penalva, David  
Rice, Mattie Mae  
Santiago, Maria  
Simmons, Angelin Jones  
Soper, Brian  
Spence, Matthew Clinton  
Trevino-Teddle, Jeannie  
Thai, Eva  
Turner, Molly  
White, Mary  
Wright, Betty  
Wilson, Bill

We are not lost, though wandering  
For by your Light we come,  
And we are still God's people,  
The journey is our home.\*

*\*Taken from the hymn text, "Lead On, O Cloud of Yahweh," by  
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We Are One People*, Ecumenical Women's Center, 1974.*

