

## The Birth and Abbreviated History of The Women's Missionary Council

What shall be seen is what can be accomplished to make the impossible, possible when there is support by at least one person in a prominent position to support a cry for inclusion. Bishop Lucius Henry Holsey was that muscle of support, and may be viewed as the "Father" of the freedom movement of missionary women in the CME Church.

The birth of this movement towards female equality and recognition in the church began to be felt formally in Georgia, in 1902, when Bishop Lucius Henry Holsey's genius, liberal views, and support were applied to the service oriented desires of the CME women missionaries, versus a prescribed need for them to just raise money. With local church and Annual Conference women leaders, Bishop Holsey established in Georgia the Women's Missionary and Educational Convention.

In the same year, 1902, Bishop Holsey combined three Georgia Annual Conference into what he called the Inter-Conference Convention, later called the "Convocation." One of the purposes of the Convocation was to focus on reversing the oppression of women in the church. Also in that same year, Bishop Holsey established the Helena B. Cobb School for girls in Barnesville, Georgia, another informal beginning of the Women Missionary Connectional Society. He saw this as a way to unify women toward becoming prepared and qualified leaders in society and for the church, an educational goal.

At the 1902 General Conference, several leading women in the CME Church, met with the College of Bishops to appeal for the establishment of a Women's Missionary Council, a national organization of missionary women. Their conference with the bishops ended without sanction, but, obviously, a seed on this subject was planted.

At the 1906 General Conference in Memphis, TN, twenty missionary women from Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma met with the College of Bishops to make a further appeal for the establishment of a Women's Missionary Society in the church. Their conference with the bishops ended without action.

At the 1910 General Conference, in Augusta, Georgia under the leadership of Mrs. Helena B. Cobb, she attempted a strategy with the College of Bishops by sending a committee of three persons to meet with the College. The College did not grant the committee a hearing. Mrs. Cobb and the missionary women did not let this quell their enthusiasm for reaching their goal. They began working on a strategy for the 1914 College of Bishops meeting at the General Conference.

At the May 1914, General Conference in St. Louis, Missouri, Mrs. Helena B. Cobb was scheduled to speak with the College of Bishops, but she became ill and Dr. Mattie E. Coleman became the spokesperson for the missionary women. In part, her speech to the College of Bishops stated:

We, your wives, mothers, daughters, sisters and friends come to you this evening on a very urgent matter. We come asking suffrage in this the great assembly in the world to us, the Colored Methodist Episcopal General Conference. We have braved the storms and helped you

bear every burden from 1870 until today. We raise 87% of the General Claims which goes to pay the Bishops' salaries and those of our general officers...And do not your pastors and presiding elders look for us to raise at least 90% of your salaries?...We represent 2/3 of the membership and with that much power, we deserve some voice."

Again, the College of Bishops rejected the request of the missionary women for a hearing. Obviously disappointed, but without malice, the women began planning for the 1918 General Conference.

Brewing among the College of Bishops, during this time, were some outside influences that may have helped to soften the College's position on this subject. The first one may have been that they believe their leadership and recognition of women were under the spotlight of the other black Methodist denominations (AME and AMEZ), which had already advanced an official recognition of their black women to do ministry. Also, what may have helped to bring this issue to the surface was the bountiful influence of the white women of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

Late one night at the May 1918 General Conference in Chicago, Illinois, the missionary women met with the College of Bishops. The committee was heard and granted permission to organize the missionary women into a national church organization. The Women's Connectional Council of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church was organized September 7, 1918 at Caper's Chapel CME Church in Nashville, Tennessee. At the 1942 General Conference, the Women's Connectional Council was made an official Department of the CME Church and the President became a General Officer of the church with a salary equal to the other General Officers paid by the Department of Finance. Also, this General Conference approved of a provision for men to be members if they had a desire. In 1963, a rule was established that Council Officers, Secretaries, and Chairpersons are elected quadrennially for a maximum of two terms or eight years. The Executive Board met in 1986 and agreed to change the name from Women's Connectional Council to the Women's Missionary Council.

In 1995, August 1<sup>st</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup>, in San Francisco, CA, Dr. Judith Grant was elected the Women's Missionary Council 8<sup>th</sup> President.

On August 1, 2003, in Charlotte, NC, Dr. Elnora P. Hamb was elected the 9<sup>th</sup> Women's Missionary Council President.

On July 1, 2011, Dr. Princess A. Pegues was elected the 10<sup>th</sup> Women's Missionary Council President.

The Logo is the wheel on which each officer, departmental chairperson, and secretary of a committee or commission is listed. Presently, the Council has a membership of about 60,000.

The Women's Missionary Council operates on 4 levels to actively engage in fulfilling its mission: (1) The Council (2) The Annual Conference (3) The District Conference (4) The Local Church. Information flows downward and each level is organized the same as the Council.

The Council serves 32 Regions (Annual Conferences) in the United States, and many Regions in Africa. The Council makes contributions to Connectional Evangelism and Expansion. It supports Education through Scholarships Aid to students:

The Colors for the Women's Missionary Council are white with a touch of royal blue. The Official Organ is the Missionary Messenger.

There has been 10 Presidents since inception of this organization:

- Dr. Mattie E. Coleman
- Mrs. Rossie T. Hollis
- Mrs. Eula W.F. Harris
- Mrs. Phylis H. Bedford
- Mrs. Pauline B. Grant
- Dr. Thelma J. Dudley
- Dr. Sylvia M. Faulk
- Dr. Judith E. Grant
- Dr. Elnora P. Hamb
- Dr. Princess A. Pegues, current president

This is the abbreviated birth and history of the Women's Missionary Council.