



History of the LWML



Written and submitted by Marlys Taege Moberg

"There's no question the church is behind you because in so many ways you are ahead of the church." With those words, a Lutheran historian applauded the progress of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML) since its founding in 1942. Its roots, however, go back nearly a century earlier.

Beginning in the 1850s, women of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS, <http://www.lcms.org>) started local auxiliaries to meet the needs of people; mending clothes for seminarians, equipping hospitals, establishing schools, developing convalescent and retirement homes, assisting orphanages and residences for people with disabilities, gathering clothing, furniture and food for indigents, and funding mission endeavors at home and abroad.

Not until the 1920s, however, did members of congregational societies begin to coordinate their efforts by uniting in state and regional leagues. Oklahoma was first in 1928, but it took more than a decade before official approval was granted for a national LCMS women's organization.

Although the U.S. was at war and travel was difficult, the founding convention, held July 7 and 8, 1942, in Chicago, was attended by over 100 women from 15 districts. The 28 delegates adopted a constitution, approved a name, chose two projects, and established a Literature Committee to publish books, a national magazine, tracts and programs. They also determined that 1/4 of the mission gifts collected in local societies would be given to the national organization and 3/4 used for district projects.

The purpose of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML), delegates agreed, was to develop a greater mission consciousness among women ("missionary education, missionary inspiration and missionary service") and to gather funds for mission projects for which no adequate provision was made in the LCMS budget. "Missionary" meant the individual member, who was to "win and hold souls for Christ the Master, visit the sick and the shut-ins, relieve the needy, and cultivate the spirit of sisterly good cheer and fellowship."

Mite Boxes were selected as the vehicle for collecting funds. Those contributions have supported Christian outreach in 42 countries on five continents. They have provided chapels and mission headquarters; hospitals and medicine, Bibles and magazines, schools and equipment, jeeps and radio transceivers, missionary vacation homes and Bible translation centers, airplanes and videos, and the list could go on and on. By 2005, international LWML mission grants (including money for mission inreach to women) totaled more than \$18,500,000. Adding the 75% in district grants and over \$2,000,000 distributed from bequests and anniversary thankofferings brings LWML gifts for the Lord's service to more than \$76,000,000.

But, the blessing of the LWML, now also known as Lutheran Women in Mission, goes far beyond the millions raised for missions. Its benefits can be seen in faith deepened through Bible studies, in confidence built through leadership training, in the befriending of career missionaries, in blankets and clothing gathered for the impoverished, in food shared with

the hungry and, above all, in the friendships nurtured and the lives changed by sharing the love of Jesus Christ.

Timeline of LWML Firsts

- Creation of a national women's organization approved at LCMS Convention – **1941**
- LWML founded in Chicago July 7-8 - **1942**.
- First project: \$15,000 for Christ Church for the Deaf, Cleveland, Ohio - **1943-45**.
- First issue of *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly* - **January 1943**.
- First society outside continental U.S.: Our Redeemer Women's Guild, Honolulu, Hawaii – **1946**
- Headquarters office established - **1947**.
- League became international when Bethlehem Women's Missionary Society, Bruderheim, Alberta, Canada, joined in **1948**. Ontario, the first Canadian district, was formed in **1950**.
- Societies encouraged to place religious books in public libraries - **1951**.
- A pilot workshop on leadership training in **1954** led to eight regional institutes – **1955**.
- League Pledge adopted - **1955**.
- LWML incorporated in State of Missouri - **1956**.
- First authorized Day of Prayer - **1958**.
- Designated as the officially recognized women's auxiliary of the LCMS - **1942**.
- First post-convention mission tour took participants to Japan, Formosa, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Thailand, India, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Italy and England - **1963**.
- Christian Growth Committee began production of annual Bible studies - **1964**.
- Members encouraged to extend hospitality and Christian concern to foreign students attending universities and colleges in their vicinity - **1965**.
- First convention filmstrip prepared to share highlights with all members - **1965**.
- First Christian Growth workshop on social concerns, **1966**.
- First Sunday in October designated as LWML Sunday - **1967**.
- Women on a Mission, 25th anniversary history of LWML, published - **1967**.
- "Strengthening the Home" regional institutes held at 17 sites - **1968-69**.
- First mission goal adopted that included funds for mission inreach to women (education, administration and service costs) - **1969**.
- Joined Lutheran Women's Cooperating Committee (LWCC) in **1970** after five years of participating as observers - **1970**. Sent two members to Japan in **1971** as part of the LWCC "Bridge Builders to Japan" program. In **1974**, the LWCC's "Faith Sharing—Hong Kong" brought together eight women from India, Taiwan, the Philippines, Japan, Hong Kong, Canada and the U.S., and included an LWML officer.
- LWML chapter formed in Hong Kong, representing 14 congregations - **1971**.

- First packet of Mustard Seeds (mini-Bible studies) published - **1971**. (These were intended for women employed outside the home to use during coffee breaks.)
- Lutheran Library for the Blind began to produce copies of the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly* in Braille - **1973**.
- After the LCMS adopted woman suffrage (**1969**), the international LWML convention (**1973**) urged women to seek and accept the new responsibilities being offered in congregations.
- Convention Bible studies led by women for the first time - **1973**.
- Board thanked LCMS for inviting six women to address the Commission on Theology and Church Relations on women's issues, urged the continuance of such opportunities, and asked that women be included in membership of all LCMS commissions and committees - **1973**.
- First interdepartmental meeting to coordinate program planning for the future - **1974**.
- First official youth representatives attended the international LWML convention - **1975**.
- The Liga de Senhoras Luteranas do Brasil voted unanimously to affiliate with the LWML - **1975**.
- LWML sent representatives to the World Hunger Seminar - **1975**.
- First Assembly of Leaders held to train district officers - **1976**.
- First set of Gleanings (large print Bible studies) produced for use in hospitals and nursing homes, **1981**; translated into Spanish, **1982**.
- Computer purchased for the LWML office - **1983**.
- Philippine Women's League accepted as partner organization - **1985**.
- Published a book, *You Are Special* - **1985**. This led to two others in the series, *You Are Loved* (**1991**) and *You Are Precious* (**1995**).
- "Linked in Prayer" program adopted, encouraging all LWML members to pray each Monday at noon - **1986**.
- First \$1,000,000 mission goal adopted - **1987**.
- "Discipling Woman to Woman Seminar" involved 46 LCMS women of varying ethnic backgrounds—Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Bahamian, African American, Hispanic, Native American, Filipino, Laotian, Cambodian, Hmong, Cuban, Puerto Rican and Indonesian - **1989**.
- Caring Ministry established, and program's first video ("I Feel So Alone") produced - **1989**. (The goal was to help LWML members minister to people facing AIDS, chemical dependency, alcoholism, child abuse, abortion and other serious problems.)
- LCMS includes the presidents of the LWML and the LLL as members of the Board for Mission Services - **1989(?)**.
- "A Light that Endures" program established with LCMS Stewardship Department to encourage women to do Christian Estate Planning and utilize deferred giving opportunities - **1990**.
- New LWML Logo adopted - **1991**.

- Jean Gems (mini-Bible studies in a "Blue Jeans pocket") developed for confirmands - **1991**.
- Canadian LWML members formed their own sister organization - **1993**.
- *Women in God's Service* (WINGS), the LWML's 50th anniversary history, published - **1991**. (This was updated in **2005** through *Women in League with the Lord*, which also traced the history of Christian women leaders from Bible times.)
- First of three books published featuring true stories of LCMS women: *A Rainbow of Saris, India*, **1996**; *One Cup of Water, China*, **1997**; and *Dreams Dawn in Africa*, **1999**.
- A research report, *Woman of God—A Spiritual Snapshot*, published, analyzing the spiritual maturity of LCMS women - **1998**.
- Other new resources in the **1995-1999** period included a video-based Bible study, a four part leadership training video series (Prepare to Serve, Prepare to Change, Prepare to Encourage, and Prepare to Reconcile) and trading cards (The King's Kards) for children, featuring women of the Bible.
- First Mission-Ministry Vision consultants trained to help local leaders strengthen their units - **1999**.
- Members provided 10,000 convention bears for distribution to children affected by the 9/11 terrorist attack in New York - **2001**
- Devotional booklet, "In His Service," published in 1999 with a camouflage cover for military personnel; requested in large quantities beginning in **2002** by chaplains in Iraq.
- DVD of national convention highlights sent to all attendees - **2005**.
- Teen LWML program created - **2005**. Subsequently named "Friends Into Serving Him®."

Marlys Taeye Moberg has served in many capacities with the Lutheran Women's Missionary League. She served on the Lutheran Woman's Quarterly staff 1963-77, 1999-2003 and as Editor-in-Chief of that publication from 1966-77. She has authored many articles and books for the LWML and Concordia Publishing House. Most recently her historical works include Women in God's Service (WINGS) - the 50th anniversary history of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML), 1992 and Women in League with the Lord - Updated LWML history, 2005.