



Painting the Portrait of the LWML:

By Marilyn McClure

History will say that the LWML Heart to Heart Sisters program began in 2001, but our wise Heavenly Father has been preparing the LWML for this program for decades. In the 1950's, LWML President Lillian Preisinger took a stand that would impact the future of this organization.

During her presidency, the LWML Convention was to be held in New Orleans. However, as preparations for that gathering were being made, President Preisinger learned that the hotel, where the convention was to be held, was segregated and would not allow black women in the hotel. President Preisinger cancelled the convention — a first for the organization. (A delegate-only gathering was held in Colorado the following year.) By her example, Lillian Preisinger sent a

message to the world that LWML is an organization that embraces, promotes, and celebrates diversity. The LWML would not tolerate segregation.

In the decades that followed, the LWML sponsored several programs (Discipling Woman to Woman, Support and Encouragement to Missionary Wives, the Sister to Sister Task Force, Bridging Cultures) to promote cultural awareness and understanding, and each had its impact. But something was still missing.

Although the Lutheran Women's Missionary League has valued every woman of our church and encouraged the participation of women of all ages, the reality was that women of diverse ethnicities were missing. African Immigrant Abeba Tzeggai describes it this way: Abeba was asked to report the findings of the Bridging Cultures program to an LWML Board of Directors meeting. She said: *I*



Anybody Missing?

looked around the room, and — with one exception — I saw women of only one color, and that was white. Abeba told them: You don't have to go to Africa or India or China. We are right here. You just need to open your doors to us, and we will be there.

Through the Heart to Heart Sisters program, the LWML has intentionally opened its doors to ethnic women. At LWML conventions in Oklahoma City, Tampa, and Sioux Falls, women leaders of Hispanic, African American, Hmong, African Immigrant, Native American, and Muslim origins were invited to pre-convention gatherings to learn about the LWML and to share their faith stories. Later, they experienced the convention together with all of their LWML sisters. They formed wonderful friendships that have continued after the conventions were over. When the Heart to Heart Sisters returned home, they shared their

experiences with the other women of their churches, letting them know that LWML has a place for them, too.

To date, 77 women have had the special distinction of participating as LWML Heart to Heart Sisters. Five of them were trained as Mission-Ministry Vision Consultants last biennium, and ten currently serve on LWML national committees — three as chairmen. Others have been speakers or presenters at zone events or rallies and district conventions. Still others have helped form new societies and worked on zone or district boards. They are delighted to serve and to be LWML Heart to Heart Sisters, and the LWML has expanded its vision because of the new perspectives and ideas that they bring to the organization.

Who's missing? The prayer of the LWML is that in the future no one will be missing. The goal of the Heart to

If you are wondering how you can reach out to people of different ethnicities, try these suggestions:

1. Get to know the ethnic women in your area. Where are their missions? Who are their leaders?

2. Visit the home of an ethnic acquaintance. If it feels a little strange to you, know that they feel the same way when they come to your gatherings. Cross-cultural experiences take some effort because there are different norms and expectations. Go with an attitude to learn and observe. Ask questions when you are unsure about what is expected.

3. Invite an ethnic woman to visit your church or LWML group. Meet them at the door and introduce them to your friends. Be a good host. Treat them as your special guests.

Make sure that children (and sometimes husbands and other relatives, too) are welcome. In some cultures the women are not accustomed to going alone. Welcome all who come.

4. Plan activities at your gatherings where everyone can share something (food, songs, prayers, crafts, etc.). Ruben Snake, who is Native American, once said, "Being Indian is having a bunch of white people who come in and do *for* you instead of doing *with* you." Plan together.

5. Be sensitive to those who are learning English. If necessary, find someone to interpret for those who have limited English skills.

6. Always ask God to guide and bless you in your efforts to extend His love to all people — remembering all of us are His children.

Heart Sisters program is to repaint the canvas of the LWML with the picture that God has given us in the book of Revelation, where His kingdom is described as being full of people from every tribe and language and people and nation.

We still have a long way to go, but we are confident that our Lord will lead us and bless us as the LWML reaches out to all women through the Heart to Heart Sisters program.

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