



Before the Throne and Before the Lamb

by Pat Reichert

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.

Revelation 7:9a



Imagine attending the next Lutheran Women's Missionary League convention. As you walk up to the registration area, you find yourself in line with women who look just like you — women of Native American, Asian, Hispanic, and African American heritage. Women of diverse backgrounds are not in the line for Special Guests, but the "A-Z" member line! Opening worship is interspersed with a variety of faces sharing in worship of our Savior. That is the dream of the women who envisioned a program to serve all of God's people in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the Heart to Heart (H2H) Sisters.

We are not there yet, but God is providing opportunities to reach many more women through H2H Sisters. In 1955, Lillian Preisinger, LWML President from 1953–1959, made the bold decision to cancel an LWML Convention in New Orleans because hotel segregation rules restricted where black delegates could stay. That was the first public indication that LWML was committed to supporting equal opportunity for women of all races.

It was a bold beginning, but women of diverse cultures were still missing from LWML gatherings, meetings, and conventions as we entered the 21st century. As a result, "Bridging Cultures" was created — an initiative to learn how LWML could reach diverse populations in our church. Women leaders of diverse cultures were invited to attend a meeting in St. Louis with key leaders from LWML to experience how they could share their passion for reaching out to others. Shortly thereafter, the Heart to Heart Sisters program was developed as an ongoing mission of the LWML.



Since those first 22 women, part of the inaugural H2H Sisters program, attended the 2003 Oklahoma City convention, a total of 168 women have participated in a national convention, either as a H2H District Leader or H2H Sister. Many continue to attend conventions, to renew friendships and to encourage each other to reach out to women in their communities. Some have gone on to serve LWML on national committees, as district officers, and committee chairmen.

The year 2001 saw the beginning of the H2H Sisters program, with the formation of a task force with this mission statement: "The purpose of the H2H Sisters Task Force is to be an advocate and plan programs for an ongoing effort within the LWML to ensure the participation of ethnic women of our church in mission." In 2013, H2H Sisters became a full-fledged LWML standing committee that continues the effort — the intentional inclusion of ethnic women in the life and work of LWML.



Ethnic women's groups from Minnesota to Texas to Michigan provide women the opportunity to use their many and diverse gifts in service to the Lord. Membership in LWML often gives women in many cultures an opportunity to use their gifts in valued and respected ways in their communities.

Support for the program comes from LWML Districts as they send women to be trained as District Leaders who, in turn, return home to identify ethnic women in their districts and to encourage them to participate in the work of the LWML. LCMS World Mission and the Office of International Missions continue to support H2H Sisters programs at their national conventions.

Available now on the LWML website are numerous H2H resources including Bible studies, PowerPoint® presentations on the history of H2H Sisters and embracing diversity, and archived *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly* articles about the accomplished women of H2H Sisters — designed to help build understanding and positive relationships in our multicultural world. Visit the site and take advantage of the wealth of resources there for you!

Now imagine another LWML convention, the one in your district. Do you see a diverse group of women sharing the joy of living as forgiven children of God? I hope so. If not, the H2H Sisters program has support for your effort to include each woman, a part of the rich diversity that is the LCMS, in the mission of LWML.

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Pat and her husband, Don, have been married for 47 years and have four children and six grandchildren. Pat finds time to provide Grandma's Spa and Day Care one afternoon and evening a week and also volunteers almost full time at Lutheran Social Service Refugee and Immigration Center. Pat and Don enjoy traveling in their RV and going on many family trips and fact-finding expeditions.