

Women's Missionary Fellowship

Donna Hollopeter

I count it a privilege to present this report to the denominational officials, the delegates, and guests attending the 2001 General Conference of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. We serve a great and mighty God. I have been blessed abundantly over the past four years to see how He has been working and continues to work in people's lives and the life of the church. In this report, I want to share just a few of the highlights of these past four years as evidence of what God is doing.

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Four years ago when I reported to the 47th General Conference, I shared that the Women's Missionary Fellowship was beginning a road leading to transition and a new look. It was evident that the WMF was struggling. We were not attracting younger women, as an organization we were sometimes a source of contention within the local body of believers, and unless we took a proactive position toward change, the demise of WMF was almost inevitable.

I, along with the International WMF Board of Directors, did not want to see this happen. Thus a concerted effort was launched to bring revitalization to the WMF as well as to open other areas of ministry for women within the local church who were not ready for WMF at this stage of their Christian walk.

I have been encouraged over the past four years as I have watched this revitalization and re-prioritization take place. I would like to share some things which I have observed as this process has been taking place.

1. I am increasingly encouraged by the reports I receive from local WMF groups as they share their activities from year to year. I am pleased that the

women are being creative and are broadening their perspectives on missions as they try new programs, assume support for both missionaries and international conferences, and accept new challenges for greater involvement in partnering with the Missions Department and international conferences to expand ministry.

A prime example of the latter is how the WMF ladies responded to a challenge to raise money to begin a new work in El Salvador. Five dollars in "Seed Money" was given to each of the 180 local WMF societies in 1999. The women were asked to invest the money in such a way that God would "grow" or multiply it. The "harvest" would be gathered at the International WMF meeting in July of 1999 and would be turned over to the Department of Missions for the new work in El Salvador. The Board of Directors set a goal of \$12,000 which would have provided for two years of support for the ministry. We found that our faith was small—God had greater things in mind. When the "harvest" was received, we gathered a little over \$30,000—enough for five years' support for the work in El Salvador. Praise the Lord!

The ladies of the WMF rose to the challenge in very creative ways. Some invested their money in materials needed to make baked goods and then sold them; others used the money for advertising and held rummage sales and special events which increased their investment; still others held contests for the "Nobbiest Knees" within their church. They bought film, took pictures of each male church member's knees, and then had the entire church vote for the "Nobbiest looking." The local societies not only

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had a good time being creative in “helping” their money grow, but it sparked a brand new interest in missions.

2. I have been encouraged by a renewed willingness on the part of the women of the WMF to be a part of the local church's Mission Commission. WMFs are no longer seeing their organization as the sole “owner” of the church's mission program. I am receiving wonderful reports of how entire congregations are working in unity to promote missions and educate others within the church about missions.

I firmly believe that if a church is going to be effective in having a vibrant missions-based ministry, it has to be through the unity of the body working together rather than in opposition to one another. I am thankful for the evidence of a growing “Unified Missions Program.”

3. I am also seeing a renewed desire on the part of the women of the church, including the WMF, in producing quality programs and materials which promote missions with excellence. In a technologically oriented society, it is important to produce programs and materials that are high quality and that indicate that mission involvement is important enough to invest time and resources necessary to produce quality work.

4. I have been impressed by and deeply indebted to the International WMF Board of Directors for the leadership which they have shown. These women—Naomi Becker, Ruth Benner, June Brown, Fonda Cassidy, Eleanore Datema, Darlene Eberly, Lois Mason, Donelle Raab, and Joan Sider, International President—have literally worked themselves out of a job. Over the past four years, they have prayed and labored over the task of preserving the WMF while at the same time launching a denominational Women's Ministry Program. Much work has been put into a proposal which will be coming before the General Conference for action which would institute a Women's Ministry program for the denomination and which would have as one of six areas of ministry the WMF as a part of the mission component.

I am thankful for the spirit of unity

and the willingness on the part of these women to step aside as officers so that other women within the denomination might have the opportunity to become coordinators for this new ministry. I want to take this opportunity to publicly thank each of these women for their hard work and for their desire to see the Kingdom of God advanced through a variety of ministry options.

5. Over this past quadrennium, the International WMF has turned all funds over to the Department of Missions. Previously, monies received into the WMF office were deposited in a separate WMF account and held for transfer at the end of each quarter. Now, all monies are deposited directly into the Department of Missions accounts designated by the donor. This action has eliminated duplication of work and has made funds readily available for use on the fields and by missionaries.

6. Another very positive action taken by the International WMF is the streamlining of the WMF Handbook. By creating suggested guidelines rather than following a strict Constitution with By-Laws, more freedom has been given to local and regional WMFs to be flexible in their structure.

7. Finally, action has been taken which now allows all WMF members attending regional and international meetings to vote on items of business. The former system of electing delegates and alternates has been eliminated, thus giving each member the opportunity to have input at all levels.

Summary of Activities During the Quadrennium

While I have seen my responsibilities as Executive Secretary of the International WMF and Associate Director of Missions grow, I have been wonderfully blessed by the opportunities that these positions have afforded me.

I have had the opportunity to be involved in the following:

- Twice have attended and conducted seminars at the Jamaican WMF Easter Monday women's rallies.
- Traveling with the Pilgrimage 2000 Team representing the Jamaican Conference for almost three weeks in the summer of 2000.

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- Had the privilege of visiting our mission work in Hong Kong, Macau, and India three years ago.
- Have attended and spoken at the annual conference in Jamaica.
- Have participated in three conferences and spoken four times in Mexico.
- Have visited several of our North American ethnic churches and have participated in two of the North American Hispanic Celebrations.
- Have attended and reported to all of the Commission on Missions meetings held during the past quadrennium.
- Have attended and reported to all of the Executive Leadership Team Meetings during the past quadrennium.
- Have attended and reported to all of the General Board of Administration Meetings of the General Church during the past quadrennium.
- Served as the chairperson for the Unified Missions Task Force.
- Served as secretary for the Cross Cultural Church Planting Leadership Team.
- Worked as a member of the Finance and Long Range Planning Committee of the Commission on Missions.
- Have taken training and have been certified as a trainer with the Great Commission and Great Commandment seminars through Sonlife Ministries.
- Have begun my training for certification in training of Women's Ministry Leaders through Sonlife Ministries.
- Have participated in numerous National Association of Evangelicals Women's Commission Meetings and was recently elected to the Executive Committee of that Commission.
- Have been appointed to the Executive Committee of an interdenominational retreat committee for Pastor's Wives.
- Have had the opportunity to represent the Department of Missions in churches 143 times in the past four years.
- Have attended the following WMF regional meetings: Auglaize 4 times; Michigan 4 times; North Michigan 4 times; Sandusky 4 times; Scioto 5 times; Mid-Atlantic 5 times; Michindoh 5 times; Midwest and Neosho 2 times;

Rock River 4 times; White River 4 times.

- Have represented the Department of Missions at all of the annual conferences on an alternating schedule with Missions Director Kyle McQuillen.
- Have worked with Steve Dennie in the production of three WMF "Fellowship Friends" newsletters as well as helping to produce and format the material for the Speaker's Bureau for the Department of Missions.
- Have written three of the past four WMF Lesson Packets in their entirety and have helped with their mailing.
- Have helped with the Communications Department at Huntington College in the production of several mission videos.
- Have participated in numerous missionary personnel pre-field interviews and post-field debriefings.
- Have scheduled speakers in local churches and for various programs. This also involves coordination of travel arrangements, helping with lodging, follow-up, and countless phone calls and emails.
- Have helped in the preparation of the mission house for use by furloughing missionaries.
- Produced a reference book for use by furloughing missionaries staying at the Myers Mission House.
- Helped with work on the Helping Hands Notebook materials which are mailed to local churches periodically.
- Have prepared quarterly financial updates on missionary and field support and made these available to local churches and WMF groups and Mission Commissions.
- Have spoken at 10 Mother-Daughter Banquets.
- Have spoken at 6 Women's Retreats.
- Have attended all meetings of the International WMF Board of Directors.

Preparations for the International Women's Conference

The summer of 2001 will see a gathering for all women of the denomination worldwide here in Huntington at the college July 20-22. This will be a wonderful opportunity for women from our local churches to come together to

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be fed spiritually and to find great fellowship with women around the world.

Our keynote speaker, Wendy Nicholson from Ontario Conference, will speak on "Dealing with Grief by the Help of God." A number of workshop opportunities will be facilitated by our international representatives.

We will also be receiving the \$20.01 in 2001 Challenge monies for three specific ministry areas:

- \$10,000 for Cross Cultural Haitian Ministry through the Southeast Conference.

- \$30,000 for our new Haitian Ministry.

- \$10,000 for the start of the denominational Women's Ministry Program.

The total challenge was for \$50,000, but because this challenge is for all women of the church, we believe that this goal will be exceeded. All monies received above \$50,000 will be divided equally among the three areas.

Future Goals

This is a "kyros" moment for the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. General Conference 2001 has the potential to see more change than ever before within the structure of the denomination. Though it is impossible to know all of the changes that will take place at the time of writing this report, and impossible to know whether I personally will be involved in the next four years, I would like to take this opportunity to do a bit of "what if" dreaming. If I have some kind of involvement in the denominational structure in the next four years, here are my dreams.

1. I would like to see a continuation toward the development of a comprehensive program of mission education for use in local churches. I firmly believe that quality programs and materials are essential, and that each church should have the following as a significant part of its program: mission education, mission giving, encouragement for participation in mission service (short-term or career), and partnering with missionaries and international conferences in ministry.

2. I would want to work with WMF groups, Women's Ministry Groups, and other local church groups as a consultant in helping to develop the best overall program that meets the needs of each specific church so that the Kingdom of God is expanded.

3. I would want to find or produce quality materials and resources which will enhance the local church's missions and women's programs.

4. I would want to learn all I can about our international fields so that I could be a better facilitator between field and home ministries.

In Closing...

I want to say thank you for the opportunities I have had to serve the Lord through missions and to work with pastors and congregations within our United Brethren denomination. My work has been challenging but oh so rewarding as well, because I have had the opportunity to meet so many wonderful brothers and sisters in the Lord. I have had the opportunity to go places, see things, learn things, and develop relationships which I never dreamed I would ever have. I have been blessed over and over by all that I have seen and done.

I want to sincerely thank my fellow workers in the Department of Missions. I have seen in each of them—Director McQuillen, Mabel Mundy, Linda Kreiger, Cyndee Christman—a true desire to serve the Lord and others.

I have also been blessed to work with a wonderful staff in the Headquarters, and I am thankful for each one and the role that they play in serving Christ's Church.

Finally, I want to thank my family for the continued support. Jason and our daughters have been a wonderful encouragement to me and have made difficult schedules easier to deal with because of the Christ-like spirit.

As a phrase from an old gospel song says, "I don't know about the future, but I know who holds my hand!"

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Hollopeter

Associate Director of Missions

Executive Secretary of WMF