Building the Denomination through Mission

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Anyone who reads the records and history of the missionary movement in American Protestantism recognizes that principles and goals of the enterprise advanced a colonialist approach. In a post-Christendom context today, the underlying assumptions of cultural superiority that attended sharing the Christian gospel with non-Christians, must be systematically assailed not only as flawed, but as antithetical to the Christian message itself. But the missionary record is being studied today, fruitfully, by historians and other researchers around the globe. Insights from the missionary records shed light on indigenous as well as European and American attitudes and life patterns. Missionaries reflected both their home cultures and revealed their creative adaptations to new experiences. Missionary records reveal important insights into the sending churches as well.

This article argues that missionary support networks and leadership structures shaped the internal development of Lutheranism in North America, and mission relationships pulled American Lutherans into world Lutheranism. Instead of a surface reading of mission as a colonialist ideology, this article will provide a historical account of what was called "The Home Base"—the support systems that evolved in American Lutheran churches to fund and advance the missionary cause. The support mustered in congregations and mission societies paid for missionaries, built schools and hospitals, and trained indigenous converts for Christian life. At the same time, these support systems also built, by expanding the horizon of service, the institutional and denominational structure of American Lutheranism. In large part this happened by enlisting the work and imagination of lay people, especially women, to organize societies, educational programs, publications, and special events, to spread information and raise substantial funds that were directed through the denomination. Readers today will gain a useful perspective not only on the spread of Western ideas but also on the effect of systematic development of leadership in the denomination itself. By envisioning the content of the Christian witness in a post-Christendom world, our imaginative efforts might also envision the effect on our churches of a changed vision for service. Will we, by changing our vision of our possible action, also remake our church body?

In the post-Christendom world we imagine, it is also important to recognize that Christianity is the fastest growing religion in the world.[1] In the places where Christian faith is spreading, the lives of men, and especially women, are changing dramatically. The churches being formed are future-oriented and youth-driven. Women are discovering possibilities through embracing Christian practice. They are changing their societies, and many find that what they take from the Christian message helps them navigate their changing world in positive ways.

Missionary support networks and leadership structures shaped the internal development of Lutheranism in North America, and mission relationships pulled American Lutherans into world Lutheranism.

Unintended consequences of missionary support

In this account, the pioneering work to support missionary work by Eastern Lutherans will be explored. Other Lutheran church bodies in the United States and Canada emulated the example of the General Synod, General Council, and the United Synod, South, especially after 1918 when these historic Eastern denominations merged into the United Lutheran Church in America. Midwestern-based Lutheran denominations gradually began to participate in the networks constructed by Eastern Lutherans, and this involvement accelerated during and after WWI, through the National Lutheran Council.[2]

Eastern Lutherans lived across the United States, with a home base in the Eastern states of North America. These

1. Statistical record of Christian expansion is provided each January in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* together with analysis of trends. The consistent picture in the 41-year history of recording trends is the growth of Christianity in the Global South.

2. E. Clifford Nelson, *The Rise of World Lutheranism,* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 66-70.

Lutherans had roots in the colonial period of American history, and from the time of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg they played an active part in the development of the country. Lutherans in the Muhlenberg tradition established churches in the eighteenth century or earlier and were not immediately touched by more conservative confessional movements in Germany and Scandinavia in the nineteenth century. At the seminary founded in 1826 in Gettysburg, Samuel Simon Schmucker taught students to be active participants in the evangelical reform movements over slavery, Sabbath keeping, and temperance. Students were automatically enrolled in the Society of Inquiry on Mission.[3] The Rev. John Bachman, in South Carolina, gave the invocation for the secession congress creating the Confederacy in 1861. Eastern Lutherans took initiatives in engaging the issues in American public life, and experienced little tension between being fully Lutheran and American. They would not think of themselves as ethnic, or foreign, or religiously exclusive in their civic involvement. To confessionally oriented Midwestern Lutherans, this engagement in public life smacked of Calvinism, and other failures, and they disparaged Eastern Lutherans because of this.

Influenced by the missionary fervor of the early nineteenth century reform movements, American Lutherans sent their first missionary to India in 1841. "Father" John Christian Frederick Heyer was commissioned by the Pennsylvania Ministerium [founded 1748] with further support from the Lutheran General Synod [founded 1820][4]. Other Protestant churches had already begun to send missionaries to India, and Lutherans from Denmark and Germany had been in India for more than one hundred years, invited there by the Danish East India company. Lutheran pastors began to reach out beyond the company churches, to join in the expanding mission work in India. Father Heyer stepped into work in a new field, but acknowledged by predecessor missionaries from other Protestant churches, and from German missionaries. Heyer was nearly fifty years old when he started his missionary career, but age did not dissuade him from venturing far beyond the frontiers of European trading posts. Within the General Synod and in the Pennsylvania Ministerium, which sometimes belonged and sometimes pulled out of the General Synod, support for a missionary had been voiced for several years and inspired even more when Father Heyer volunteered his services. He traveled to India on a boat from Boston that was also transporting ice to the subcontinent.

News of the missionary work of Father Heyer, and later for India missionary Walter Gunn and his wife, Lorena, gave American Lutherans a tantalizing glimpse into the exotic world of foreign mission. Lorena Gunn not only "followed" her husband but led in the exacting work of mission, learning the language spoken in homes while her husband learned the language in his study as he translated the Bible. He succumbed to tuberculosis; Lorena survived and returned to Lutheran church circles at home. She shared in the founding work of organizing Lutheran women into local, congregationally based women's missionary societies.[5]

The organization of a general, or national Lutheran Women's Missionary Society [WMS] followed in the next decade. It was a revolutionary step to organize women, and the men in charge of the denomination took care and overcame opposition.

The development of women's missionary societies in the United States began with Methodist women in Northern churches after the Civil War.[6] In 1869, just as the cross-continental railroad was completed, Methodist women organized in Boston. They were assisted by their husbands calling a public meeting. The purpose of their organizing was to provide support for missionaries in India. The organization of a general, or national Lutheran Women's Missionary Society [WMS] followed in the next decade. It was a revolutionary step to organize women, and the men in charge of the denomination took care and overcame opposition.

Lutheran women began meeting in local missionary societies, mostly in the Midwest, in the more Americanized General Synod congregations.[7] The women in Springfield, Ohio, at Wittenberg College, instructed delegate JHW Stuckenberg to present their resolution to the General Synod's 1877 convention in Carthage, Illinois. He used a plea made on the General Synod floor that the women be called on to raise and provide necessary funds for the mission effort as an occasion for bringing forward the women's request. His wife, Mary Gingrich Stuckenberg, along with Lorena Gunn, widow of the first Lutheran missionary in India, participated in active organizing. The General Synod was the most progressive and outward oriented of the national church bodies of Eastern Lutheranism.[8] The resolution passed with the provision that local societies, then regional, and finally a national organization be supervised by a General Synod mission committee,

3. Society of Inquiry on Missions records are held at the United Lutheran Seminary Library on the Gettysburg Campus.

4. E. Theodore Bachmann, *They Called Him Father,* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1942), 124-149.

5. Maria Erling, "Walter Gunn and Mikko Juva: Students and Mission at Gettysburg Seminary". Gettysburg Seminary Bulletin, (Gettysburg: Lutheran Theological Seminary, 1999)

6. Dana Robert, *American Women in Mission: The Modern Mission Era 1792-1992.* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997).

7. William Avery describes the relative Americanization of the General Synod, General Council, and United Synod of the South, in *Empowered Laity: The Story of the Lutheran Laity Movement*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 5-15.

8. "Eastern Lutheranism" is the term used by Midwestern Lutherans to describe those American churches of colonial background. Eastern Lutherans of the General Synod [1820], the General Council [1867], and the General Synod South [1861] merged into the United Lutheran Church in 1918.

all men, of course. At the next synod meeting two years later held in Canton, Ohio, the permission was given for the women to organize a national society.

This pioneer Lutheran missionary society led to the organization of women across American Lutheranism. Coordinating the energy of local, congregational societies led to such success in raising money that other Lutheran church leaders "asked" their women to organize. General Synod women sought contact with other denominations and used ideas from other denominational women's societies. General Synod leaders sought to claim paternity, saying their role was necessary due to "the timidity and backwardness of the women." That brought a retort from Mary Stuckenberg: "Such women would never have started the movement," she noted, underscoring the need for aggressive leadership. [9]

Women's leadership in American Lutheran denominations emerged through these missionary support networks. Lutheran denominations formed Women's Missionary Societies beginning in the nineteenth century, and this was consequential for women and for their churches. Women organized fundraising campaigns, produced literature and magazines, and in a practical way taught women in congregations how to conduct meetings, keep track of expenses, speak, write, and network. Women traveled to attend national meetings. Patricia Hill, in her groundbreaking study of nineteenth century church women notes that more than 3 million American women joined missionary societies, more than joined the suffrage movement. [10] One consequence of their widespread influence was the revitalization of their congregations, and their denominations. Funding channeled by women in these societies made a big difference in the development of Lutheran denominations in the United States.

Women's "work for women" in the foreign fields can certainly be examined as an extension of a colonialist mindset, and rightly critiqued. Still, another aspect of their organizational effort should be recognized. The significant leadership development for women at home as they worked in congregations and synods to advance mission work, especially among foreign women, contributed to the institutional development of American Lutheran denominations in many areas—colleges, hospitals, nursing programs, and missionary training. As women's organizations evolved, and as denominational mergers provided openings for women to serve on denominational mission boards, women also entered professional church work.

Women's public role emerged through the missionary movement

Girls received ornamental rather than professional education in the early years of Lutheran church life. When they were educated privately, or through the auspices of a friendly brother, girls with plenty of initiative and organizational skills did not expect to have public responsibilities. Given the social reality that defined them, a public role beyond the home did not exist for them, except via possible, and not insignificant, influence of husbands, brothers, sons, and fathers. On their own, women's voices would not gain a hearing.

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There was an exception to these restrictions in the church, and its mission. Social boundaries that defined women's special role did, however, allow for women's participation in the world missionary movement. Because of the separate spheres deemed appropriate for women and men, missionary theorists accepted that women were needed to reach other women. And this mandate to work with women in the foreign lands was first articulated in the sending of missionary wives in 1792. They were to "Go" and this mandate was a large one, dedicating women in the mission field as responsible also for the social transformations that would attend the work with women, in their spheres.[11] While Protestant missionary leaders in the United States and in England grappled with the theory and methods of missionary science, which was developed largely through work in India, the needs of male missionaries for the support of a wife and family necessarily drew women into service in the mission field. But beyond this, women enlisted to advance the mission task recognized that male missionaries, who could not even speak to women in some countries, could only educate boys and men. Their Christian converts would not find suitable Christian brides since girls and women could not receive Christian instruction from the missionary. The missionary's wife, however, could meet with women, and could instruct girls. Eventually female missionaries were sent by Protestant mission boards to work in the segregated educational and medical fields, where men and women, boys and girls, were treated separately.

Providing an education for these pioneering missionary

9. John O. Evjen, *The Life of JHW Stuckenberg, Theologian, Philosopher, Sociologist, Friend of Humanity.* (Minneapolis, 1938), 231.

10. Patricia Hill, *The World Their Household: The American Women's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870-1920.* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985), 3.

11. Robert, *American Women in Mission,* 3-4.

women is also at the heart of women's higher education in the United States. Educating women for the missionary field led to women's colleges and to broader horizons for women's education and public roles. The missionary movement also pushed for educating girls and women in the mission field, prompting cultural developments around the world. Whether or not the missionary movement led to many conversions, there were unintended consequences of colonialization that included expanded roles for women at home and abroad, and particularly the organizing of ordinary women within Protestant congregations to support the movement, and that came to include Lutherans across North America. Within the orbit of the women's missionary movement, the largest number of American women were organized, far more than participated in the suffrage movement. These women did hear a "call" of sorts that their churches recognized, to heed Jesus' great commission. But, of course, they could not preach, and if they could teach it could only be a class of girls, and the Great Commission might need to be shortened to the command to "Go."[12] And they did.

With energy and enthusiasm, women joined these societies and experienced a world beyond their mostly parochial world. The movement joined them to other women, but the lives and work of these women mostly remains nameless. Names and plaques and faces of the Women's Missionary Societies of Lutherans still remain obscure to us. But it is important to try to piece together an interpretive framework for understanding the rise of women's leadership in the churches. Such work will depend on several interpretive moves that are not traditionally thought to pertain to women's leadership. First, such a history approaches the missionary movement with sympathy, rather than post-colonial suspicion and disdain. Second, such a history looks at the separate, auxiliary organizing of women in a positive light, as an arena for cultivating leadership rather than a second-class domain. Third, the focus in this history must remain on a collective level, on organizing and networking rather than on individual personalities. This is mostly because of the nature of denominational record keeping. Records for women's involvement are very sparse. Institutional structures of the denomination rarely mobilized to retain records of women's organizing work, as was axiomatic with male denominational executives. The institutions and parallel structures that women created—separate magazines, schools, professional societies, and social gatherings—disappeared when women were brought into the leadership structures of the denomination itself, when in the mid-twentieth century Lutheran women were "allowed" to be delegates to conventions, or sit on executive boards, a token presence alongside men. As a consequence of their inclusion, female-led publications and boards that retained records and fostered a living network of story tellers has been absorbed, through merger and social changes, into larger male-dominated structures. These administrations became more impersonal as the work grew. Then, denominational offices were organized along modern business lines, and served modern ideals of uniformity, efficiency, and professionalization. The more personal details of individuals lie buried in files and reports, while missionary stories were summarized and mimeographed.

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A difficulty and frustration for any researcher is the disappearance of women's names from the public record when they marry. Her husband's name will not disclose to us the family networks that may well have influenced a particular leading woman to act as she did. We do not know important things about her—parents, siblings, or family friendships—that we could ordinarily tease out if we limited our attention to male leaders. We instead have access to less personal information, and we can sometimes only guess about family ties that may be significant, but invisible to us. But that veil that separates us from knowing more about these women was exactly what they needed to be able to step out and take on the responsibility for promoting the work of women in mission.

The church as a respectable place to organize

Woman's Missionary Society organizing built upon motivations quite different than that of the suffrage movement. The spiritual dimension of church work authorized their meetings. Women learned to think of women missionaries and their work as closely connected to work at home. They aspired to support the creation of Christian homes for women in different cultures, making the work of women at home extend to the world. Taking John Wesley's quip that "The World is my Parish," to heart, Methodist women coined the phrase "The World is my Household" to declare their ambitious goals.[13] Exalting rather than slighting women's work,

12. Emmy Ewald [founder of the Augustana women's missionary society] in her talk at the fiftieth-year jubilee dinner of the Minnesota Conference of the Augustana Synod, 1910, showed that she was well read in the accounts of the sending of women as missionary helpers. See Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 3.

13. Hill, *The World Their Household,* 3; Dana Robert explores the theology of the Christian home in "What Happened to the Christian

missionary organizing fit a conservative understanding of women's roles while defining an expanded horizon, explicitly beyond their homes, in the world.

The all-male delegations at Lutheran conventions, such as the General Synod convention in Carthage, Illinois, June 1877, envisioned the possibility of organizing women's missionary auxiliaries as the important first step to develop the agencies that their church needed.[14] Recognizing the power in women's influence changed the denomination. Other changes for American Lutherans contending with a flood of immigrants from Northern Europe perhaps inculcated a sense of responsibility for building up not only the church, but also society. The missionary movement, however, seemed to be a galvanizing reform that cut across the differences of language and experience. The records of the immigrant churches founded after the Civil War also showcase their buildings, their schools and colleges, newspapers, and the work of women organizing to support missionaries.[15]

The special focus of women's missionary societies on women's work for women filled a gap that previous missionary work did not meet in its focus on the conversion and education of boys. Women were needed to reach the foreign women, who could not be taught by male missionaries. The plight of girls who had no education and women who had no independent sphere of work in the constricted roles assigned to them in their non-Christian culture, spurred Lutheran women to raise funds and awareness of the missionary movement in the pews of evangelical churches across the land. The encouragement of women's activities brought an awareness of their potential impact. *Lutheran Evangelist* borrowed stories from the work of Baptists in India to extol the pioneering work of Mrs. Wilson in India. [16] Mrs. Wilson went to India in 1821; fifty-five years later, the small start had blossomed: "The faithful work of years has already brought blessed results, there are now some thirty thousand girls in the mission schools in India, representing the combined efforts of twenty-five different missionary societies, and the entire church of Christendom." This was of course an overstatement.[17] But the work, waiting for

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more consecrated workers and more funds, was not finished: "The crying want of India is Christianity and well-ordered Christian homes are one of the greatest wants of the Indian church. There are some such homes, but they are very few. We need no arguments to convince us of the matchless worth and priceless blessings of Christian homes."[18] The agenda for Christian, Lutheran women, was clearly laid out in this Lutheran publication: Lutheran women, too, could join this vast collective work and do their part in the great cause of Christendom.

The growth of women's missionary societies in American Lutheran churches occurred in the separate sphere appointed by the social norms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was not an insignificant space, as churches dominated a much larger segment of available time and money in American life, especially in the small towns and rural areas where much of the population lived.[19]

With increasing visibility, Lutheran women also began to seek educational opportunities; their eagerness put pressure on the colleges and academies that had been founded to serve as preparatory schools for ministers. Gradually, Lutheran colleges led in training women to engage more fully in church life, but accessing a Lutheran education was an uphill climb for potential women students east of the Mississippi. Lutheran colleges in the Midwest enrolled women from the start as building separate schools was too costly for recently arrived eastern settlers and immigrants.[20] Back home, Eastern Lutherans followed the

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Home? The Missing Component of Mission Theory," *Missiology: An International Review, Vol. XXXIII, no. 3.*

14. *Lutheran Evangelist, vol 1 no 24, June 22, 1877* "Spirit of the Carthage Convention"

15. *Lutheran Evangelist* began in Springfield, Ohio, in1877 to encourage outreach to these immigrant arrivals and support the development of the Lutheran church west of the mountains. It was an early supporter and promoter of the Sunday school work of the General Synod, friendly to Chautauqua's pioneering work to train Sunday school workers, and a promoter of women's organizing in societies to support missions. Hill, *The World Their Household,* 237. Immigrant groups also started newspapers soon after they arrived. Swedish Lutherans founded *Hemlandet, Det Gamla och Nya* [The homeland, old and new], in 1854, published in Galesburg, Illinois. See Maria Erling and Mark Granquist, *The Augustana Story,* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2008), chapter 2.

16. This story illustrates the difficulty in gaining insight about Mrs. Wilson, due to the conventional shielding of them from the public gaze. *Lutheran Evangelist,* Vol 1, no 25, June 29, 1877.

17. "The Work of Christian Women's Missionary Societies," *Lutheran Evangelist,* Vol 1, no 41, p. 1.

18. "The Work of Christian Women's Missionary Societies," *Lutheran Evangelist,* Vol 1, no 41, p. 1.

19. The percentage of rural vs urban population in 1880 was 80 to 20, in 1900 it was 60 to 40, in 1920 it switched to the reality we know today—the urban population predominated 51 to 49 and has continued to expand to over 80%. Jeff Hoyt, "1800 – 1990: Changes in Urban/Rural U.S. Population," http/Seniorliving.org, accessed January 29, 2025.

20. This was true of Minnesota's Gustavus Adolphus College

tradition of supporting separate female seminaries, but Lutheran institutions were few and far between.[21] Wherever they were educated, the women's missionary societies benefitted from the leadership of college-educated women, for it became the pattern that the wife of the pastor would lead in organizing the women in the parish, and connect them to other women in the district, conference, and synod.

The Church in action saw reduced conflict and new enthusiasm

Lutheran publications such as *Lutheran Evangelist* provided a focus for late nineteenth and early twentieth century church work by encouraging women, and young people. The modern method was to form societies and take on projects of service to their congregation, and to the church at large, all to strengthen the mission work of the denomination. By contrast, the several Lutheran publications founded earlier in the nineteenth century, *The Lutheran Observer, The Lutheran Missionary,* and *The Evangelical Review*, focused attention for their largely clerical readership on issues in dispute in the doctrinal divisions that had separated Lutherans and that had resulted in the split between General Synod and the General Council. The debates about confessional subscription in the 1840s evolved after this separation into disputes over pulpit and altar fellowship. As immigrants arrived in the Midwest their pastors and leaders took sides in these disputes and generated their own. American Lutheran histories largely traced these arguments and separations over election, public schools, the lodge, and exclusive altars and pulpits. These disputes got in the way of organizing and raising funds. The inaugural year of *Lutheran Evangelist* carefully stated the position this newspaper would take on church controversies, and assured readers that readers of a paper intended for Lutherans west of the mountains—Ohio and further—could count on fair and accurate reports, but a focus turned instead to matters that would assist the congregations in their own work. Their cause was evangelism, or mission, at home and abroad.

> We feel that the need of the church is not contention, but spiritual truth, edification, warm love, inner unity and zeal in the work of Christ. The field for Christian effort and for the manifestation of Christian affection

Stuckenberg and Passavant turned their attention from church teaching to church work, and led by Stuckenberg and his wife, Mary, the organizing of women into societies became an important first step. In this move, they hoped to reinforce more constructive efforts to buttress the mission interests of the denomination.

> and sympathy, is so large; our missionary work is so great; the demand for the saving truth of Christ, about which Christians can have no controversy, is so urgent; and the development of the religious life of our churches is so important, that we cannot think of neglecting these for the sake of fostering strife. Our friends may, therefore, expect us to eschew all controversy, as far as consistent with these great interests and with the maintenance of the truths of salvation.[22]

Johan Henrick Wilburn Stuckenberg [JHW] fiercely defended the General Synod, but after a few years of newspaper wars he recognized the ongoing doctrinal divisions could not be resolved through arguing in the church press. His launch of *Lutheran Evangelist*, like the better-known philanthropic career of William A. Passavant of the General Council, responded to the challenge of building the country and church in the Midwest. They led the churches in responding, and the results were hospitals, orphanages, old people's homes, both at home and overseas.[23] These men turned their attention from church teaching to church work, and led by Stuckenberg and his wife, Mary, the organizing of women into societies became an important first step.[24] In this move, they hoped to reinforce more constructive efforts to buttress the mission interests of the denomination. This meant that they published items inspiring purposeful action that would motivate women readers. Advertisements for denominational schools, publishing stories promoting the goals of WMS leaders, and highlighting the

founded in 1864, Bethany College in Kansas, 1881, Augustana College founded in 1860 admitted women in 1881 after learning that Luther College in Wahoo, Nebraska, was planning to admit women. St. Olaf College began in 1874 with women enrolled, The Missionary Institute in Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania that later became Susquehanna University was typical of Eastern Lutheran colleges, as it admitted women informally after the closing of a local woman's seminary in 1870, and admission was made official in the charter forming Susquehanna University in 1895. (Information gained from the several college websites, accessed January 22, 2025.

21. Susquehanna's Female Seminary folded into the nearby Susquehanna Missionary Institute, Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania, in 1870. Marion College in Virginia started in 1873 near Roanoke College and provided women's education as a Lutheran junior college until 1967.

22. *Lutheran Evangelist,* Vol.1, no 1, January 5, 1877.

23. G.H. Gerberding, *The Life and Letters of W.A. Passavant*, *DD,* (Greenville, Pennsylvania : The Young Lutheran Co., 1906).

24. John Evjen, *The Life of J. H. W. Stuckenberg, Theologian, Philosopher, Socialist*. (Minneapolis: Lutheran Free Church Publishing Co., 1938), covers Stuckenberg's career through his chaplaincy in the Civil War, , his teaching at Wittenberg College in Springfield, Ohio, his pastoral work in Berlin at the American Church, and finally his teaching at Harvard as the first professor of Religious Sociology at the end of the nineteenth century. He should be better known among Lutherans.

funding and training needed to support the sending of missionary workers.[25]

Mission boards and world Lutheran cooperation

Advancing women's participation in their churches under the auspices of missionary support led to women's education, experience in public speaking, and the organizational training needed to run a volunteer organization. WMS activities also drew young women into missionary service, and news of the activities of the Eastern Lutherans spread to the other Lutheran churches.[26] What Lutheran women started to do in the 1870s is but one example of the widening horizon of American Lutherans. Women gained notice and responsibility, and built networks, and recruited workers for the mission field, and raised money to support them. By 1920, American Lutheran denominations had developed systems and funding to oversee the increasing number of missionaries, men and women, sent by the churches. The growing work on the mission fields expanded tasks for denominational leaders, who had far more administrative tasks than earlier generations of synod presidents. Older models of church leadership relied on respected pastors of large congregations, who managed pastoral placements and funds, but little else between conventions, all from their pastor's study. Lutheran denominations, geared for missionary support both in home mission on the expanding frontier and foreign mission, needed offices and secretaries and treasurers who worked year-round. The full-time church executive was born. Christendom's expanding responsibilities professionalized the churches. They had a mission. They needed committees, they sought funds.

By 1920, the Eastern Lutherans had overcome their earlier separation, and after celebrating the 400th anniversary of the Reformation, followed the advice of the laymen who organized the Reformation celebration and the three churches, General Synod, General Council, and the United Synod South merged into the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA). Meeting at their second convention in Washington, D.C., the work of merging the several boards and commissions from their predecessor bodies had been partially accomplished. Dominating the ULCA in numbers of delegates was the Ministerium of Pennsylvania, sending 48 clerical delegates, the next largest synod delegation sending 17. The Ministerium of PA held on to its prerogatives, former congregations, and pastors well beyond what may be expected, as it celebrated its 200th anniversary in 1948 and only after that became absorbed within the geographic delineation of East Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The Ministerium of Pennsylvania spirit ensured a careful attention to tradition and doctrinal clarity and would have emphasized these values on the convention floor. The best-known outcome of the Washington Convention is its important *Washington Declaration* describing the attitude of the ULCA toward other Lutherans. The discussion of this declaration came after President Frederick Knubel's report, on the first day of the convention. Three pages of text in the minutes delineated the doctrinal subscription of the ULCA to the three ecumenical creeds, the Scriptures, the Confessions, and the forms of ecclesial leadership important to secure these principles. The declaration then turned to the ULCA's attitude toward relationships with other Lutheran church bodies:

By 1920, the Eastern Lutherans had overcome their earlier separation, and after celebrating the 400th anniversary of the Reformation, followed the advice of the laymen who organized the Reformation celebration and the three churches, General Synod, General Council, and the United Synod South merged into the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA).

> In the case of those church bodies calling themselves Evangelical Lutheran and subscribing the Confessions which have always been regarded as the standards of Evangelical Lutheran doctrine, the United Lutheran Church recognizes no doctrinal reasons against complete co-operation and organic union with such bodies.[27]

The declaration applied not only to American Lutherans, where it met a chilly reception because it did not advance the inerrancy of Scripture, but importantly to other Lutheran churches around the world, not excluding the emerging Lutheran churches on the mission field.

On that day, the report of the Foreign Mission Board dominated the morning session. Here, as well, the consolidation of the three church bodies had consumed much of the energy of the board during the year, with the additional wrinkle of finding

25. Jean LeGros has written about the long journey to coeducation at Gettysburg College, founded in 1832: "The long path to permanent coeducation Gettysburg College: admitting 'young ladies' to America's oldest Lutheran college," STM Thesis, ULS, 2019.

26. The organization of missionary societies or federations among Lutheran women began with the General Synod in 1879, next were the Swedish Lutheran Augustana Synod 1892, followed by the Pennsylvania Ministerium 1895, United Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1903, General Council 1911, General Synod South, Ohio Synod 1913, Danish Synods American Evangelical Danish Synod 1919, United Evangelical Lutheran Church 1932, and finally Missouri Synod women, in 1938.

27. Minutes of the 2nd Biennial Convention of the ULCA, Washington, D.C., October 19-27, 1920, p 96.

a way to retain a working relationship with two separate church bodies—the Augustana Synod and the United Evangelical Danish Church—which had been a part of the General Council but had declined membership in the United Lutheran Church in America. Their missionaries in India, Africa, and Japan, needed to be closely related to the ongoing ULCA mission work and supervision, and these churches had agreed also to contribute substantially to the mission work of the ULCA. Still, the apportionment system, by which synods would agree to contribute an amount to the budget for mission work, was not entirely reliable and would become less so, unless there was concurrent work to increase stewardship knowledge and enthusiasm in congregations. For this reason, president of the Foreign Mission Board, the Rev. Ezra Keller, was pleased to commend the additional funding, coming under a separate category of "special" giving by the Women's Missionary Society:

> The consecration and activity of the WMS in the cause of Foreign Missions are a source of great encouragement and gratification to the Bd the arrangement with the WMS, whereby all their contributions are counted as specials in excess of the apportionment, relieves the bd of foreign Missions of much financial anxiety; and the purpose of the WMS to assume the entire financial obligation for all women's work in our foreign fields, has our most grateful commendation.[28]

As a separate auxiliary, the WMS continued its separate publication, *Lutheran Women's Work* begun by the General Synod women in 1909. This magazine promoted the work of women missionaries and encouraged mission study groups for members across the church. The educational work done by the mission publication made ULCA women knowledgeable, also, about the special challenges facing American Lutheran work in relation to other Lutheran missionary societies, particularly the German societies that had been "orphaned" during the World War as they were in British territory.

The Foreign Missions report brought this information forward to the convention by outlining an important consequence of the war on the staffing and leadership of mission stations and churches. Because the German missionaries left the field, and there were not enough American, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, or Finnish missionaries to fill the additional posts, native leaders had to take hand of their own churches and missions. Using the example of the Gossner mission in India, the report continued:

> The political changes in India are reflected in the missionary situation. The transfer of responsibility and power from foreign missionaries to India hands, the organization of autonomous Churches and the movements towards union among Mission and Churches, have been hastened by changed circumstances arising during and after the war. In two German Missions, The Leipsic and the Gossner, the former being the oldest Protestant Mission in India, the latter the largest Lutheran Mission in the land, the Christians were forced to assume direction of their own affairs to an extent which would have been considered impossible before the war. Complete autonomy, however, is retarded by the financial weakness of the native Christians.[29]

The resulting shift of missionary personnel into the positions vacated by German missionaries introduced new processes and patterns of church life to local churches. American Lutherans accepted additional responsibility for these missions, raising more money, learning about the interactions abroad with a wider range of international Lutheran mission efforts. The elements of a World Lutheran reality began to take shape.

There is a lot to unpack in this small paragraph. It is clear to us with the perfect vision of hindsight that the "native" Christians were perfectly capable of directing their own affairs. It was widely understood that German missions were slower to pass on leadership compared to the mission work done by other sending churches. Educational requirements for pastors in those missions did not reflect the local culture. Similar transitions happened during the war in the mission territories where German missionaries served Africa and in East Asia. The resulting shift of missionary personnel into the positions vacated by German missionaries introduced new processes and patterns of church life to local churches. American Lutherans accepted additional responsibility for these missions, raising more money, learning about the interactions abroad with a wider range of international Lutheran mission efforts. The elements of a World Lutheran reality began to take shape.

Reassuring the delegates about the transition in leadership, the board reported that the Gossner Lutheran Church was not without guidance. It was now "under the general supervision of an Advisory Board, appointed by the National Missionary

28. Minutes of the 2nd Biennial Convention of the ULCA, Washington, D.C., pp 119-120.

29. Minutes of the 2nd Biennial Convention of the ULCA, Washington, D.C., p 129.

Council, a representative organization of all Protestant Missions in India," what was even more important to the ULCA leaders was that "one member of this Advisory Board, who is resident in Ranchi, Chota Nagpur, and is the Secretary of the Board, is the Rev. George A. Rupley, of our Telugu Mission."[30] These arrangements were coordinated by a new entity, the National Lutheran Council, formed after the war to coordinate the work of American Lutherans overseas. To the relief of the ULCA Foreign Mission Board, the National Lutheran Council assumed financial responsibility for preserving this Lutheran Church in India. The work of committees and boards and mission supervision required attention and measured judgment, and many meetings and reports.

The international dimension of foreign mission work among Lutherans should not be understood as a series of bilateral relationships, for example between Americans and Indian converts in the Andhra Mission, for the General Synod, or the Rajahmundry mission for the General Council. American Lutherans also had other international ties and awareness with European counterparts that were strengthened by common commitment to mission work. American Lutheran denominations founded by immigrants, like the Augustana Synod, or the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church retained ties with the churches in their homelands. These churches, the Church of Sweden, or some of the Evangelical Mission societies formed during the nineteenth century revivals had influenced emigrants who then formed churches in North America, retaining pietist, or mission commitments in their new churches. On both sides of the Atlantic missionaries were commissioned by European and American Lutherans and funded through similar societies to serve in India, Africa, China, Japan, and South America. In those foreign fields, missionaries from American Lutheran churches worked cooperatively with missionaries from their homelands. Their children attended the same missionary boarding schools and visited at the same retreats. These ties were not just sentimental but actual working relationships sustained by mutual commitment to evangelical, mission-focused ideals.[31]

Mission commitments shared among so many did not necessitate unity: Norway's revival stirred up spirited resistance to any establishment and translated into the emergence of five independent missionary societies, dividing not only Lutherans but sparking the emergence of free churches, including a strong Pentecostal movement.[32] Whether spirit-led or establishment-minded, missionaries met on the mission field, and were guided by boards, supported by women's auxiliaries, and aligned to specific mission training schools. Separate initiatives differed over biblical interpretation, ecclesiological ordering, and disputes over missionary training. They shared a similar evolution: institutionalization of publications, professionalized marketing and appeals for funds, and the similar supervision processes enacted through reports to boards, committees, and synods. Finally, in the mission field missionaries from various societies often worked together, blurring lines rigidly kept at home, and complaining about the executives coming from their home base who did not really understand all the work, but demanded statistics for their reports.[33]

Women's leadership in American Lutheranism established the success of American Lutheran denominations during the first part of the twentieth century. … Their work to strengthen relational ties among women, recruit youth for church vocations, and to participate in outreach ventures in their local communities made the actions of ordinary women relevant and vital for their churches.

Women's leadership, mission, and the denominational success story

Women's leadership in American Lutheranism established the success of American Lutheran denominations during the first part of the twentieth century. While absent from subsequent denominational merger discussions, the separate Women's Missionary Societies of the several Lutheran churches that later merged did cooperate in publications and missionary training, meeting in national conferences and sharing in the work of recruiting women for missionary service at their colleges. They did

30. Minutes of the 2nd Biennial Convention of the ULCA, Washington, D.C., p 129.

31. Erling and Granquist, *The Augustana Story*, chapters 3 and 11.

32. Allan Anderson, *Spreading Fires: The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism* (London: SCM & Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 20070, provides a detailed view of the complex revival context in Norway that influenced many churchly and free church missionary ventures. See also "The Vision of the Apostolic Faith: Early Pentecostalism and World Mission," in *Swedish Missiological Themes,* 97, 3 ,2009. Thomas Jacobson, *Pain in the Belly: The Haugean Witness in American Lutheranism,* (Wipf and Stock, 2024), 101-104 explores the relationship between the Lutheran Free Church and its Haugean counterparts in the mission field in South Africa; Stanley Quanbeck's memoir, *The Rest of the Story*, edited by James Vigen, (self-published, 2024) details relationships in Madagascar three generations long among Norwegian and American Norwegian missionaries. Transition to speaking Malagasy made this possible.

33. Ibid.

not venture into disputes over the lodges or biblical interpretation, leaving that to the clergy. Their work to strengthen relational ties among women, recruit youth for church vocations, and to participate in outreach ventures in their local communities made the actions of ordinary women relevant and vital for their churches. The impact of the work of women in their church in local on behalf of the needs of the world in wider global settings had more than an aspirational effect. These efforts and the communication methods necessary for their success built and fostered the networks that made Lutheran and other Protestant denominations so cohesive. And the women educated their congregations about foreign missions so that far away churches in Tanyanika and Madagascar in Africa, Guntur in India, or the Hunan Province in China seemed familiar to them.

In the 1930s the ULCA took two conventions to pass a resolution allowing women to become delegates to the national convention, and to vote in their churches. First, the 1934 Savannah convention received a report on women as delegates but because of a minority report on the study submitted by two on the committee, the whole convention punted a decision to the seminary faculties for further work on the biblical objections to women's leadership. The Letter to Timothy's injunction that "women must keep silence" needed expert interpretation to determine its relevance to the role of serving as delegates to conventions. Was being a delegate stepping over the line of silence? The vote to accept women as delegates, which passed in 1936, became a sign of things to come—women would be incorporated into the denomination's structure as never before. It was only a matter of time for there to be women seated as representatives on one of the church's boards.

No sooner said, than done. The ULCA led other Lutherans in bringing on two women to serve as full time denominational staff for the Board of Education.

Mary Markley and Mildred Winston professionalized the work of the WMS when they officially took up the work of educating and recruiting women for church work and possible missionary service through the ULCA's Department of Education, directed by H. Gould Wickey. Dr. Mary E. Markley (1881-1954) was the first woman called to full time for service for an American Lutheran church body. She was responsible for relating to students, but also to the board of deaconesses, the women's missionary societies, the guild of Lutheran nurses, and to the publishing department of the women's magazine—*Lutheran Woman's Work*. According to one annual report in 1940 she served in three capacities: 1) the church's representative on ecumenical boards, the Student Volunteers for Mission, the World Student Christian Federation, United Board for Women's Colleges, and the National Commission on University work. 2) worked to promote educational work through giving addresses at conventions, conferences, churches, societies, editorial work for the main publication of the ULCA board of Education, the National Lutheran Educational Conference Bulletin, and through writing articles in The Lutheran and Lutheran Woman's Work and 3) work with Student Groups,

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regular campus visits; Conferences: Lutheran—Regional and National LSAA Interdenominational—Campus, National International, Winthrop College in South Carolina, Consultative in Toronto, Christian Youth in Amsterdam, University Christian Mission Visits. This was an impressive list of responsibilities that provides a compilation of the wide-ranging network of relationships that stemmed from the work of the WMS begun in the 1870s.

Mary Markley was a career Lutheran executive—inspiring other Lutheran women in their churches. Her diplomatic and professional skills modeled the possibilities of full-time professional service in the church for women in the Lutheran church. Augustana Synod's Women's Missionary Society leader Mrs. Daniel [Nellie] Martin wrote to Markley after attending a session at the ULCA convention in November 1940. "I tried to find you at the closing session of the convention in Des Moines but was unable to do so. … There are many fine women in your group who are making splendid contributions to the advancement of missions. It is a treat to sit and listen to other groups as they conduct the business before them, especially when they do it so well and capably. The attendance at your sessions was inspiring."[34] Markley's work was so extensive that another woman, Mildred Winston (1900-1980), joined her in the education department of the ULCA. In addition to articles for the women's magazine, she promoted the work of women in the church and wrote a pamphlet to put in the hand of church executives: *Women, A resource for the Church*, and for young people a book called *Going to College*. [35]

In Winston's work, a focus on improving the training for women involved her in the study of the deaconess program and also the enlistment of a consultant sociologist, Frances Cummings, to conduct surveys among women being recruited for church work. Cummings wrote to Winston that the different categories for women's work in the churches were noted in the survey which had been sent out, compiled, and studied. There were opportunities for nurses, parish workers, social workers, missionaries, and educators. In the case of Lutheran social workers, she thought it should be in a special category, as "when approached, these social workers, even

34. Markley papers, United Lutheran Seminary archives, Gettysburg Wentz Library, box 1.

35. Mildred Winston papers, Women in the ULCA file, Box 1, Seminary archives, United Lutheran Seminary. Gettysburg Campus, Wentz Library.

when at a Lutheran institution, did not want to be identified as church workers."[36] By 1946 educated women were moving away from an identification with the church, seeing that they had new opportunities, or sensing that a church affiliation might affect their professional work.

Markley and Winston fully embraced the need for improvement in the ULCA. They cooperated with the executive director, Wickey, but also pushed back when executives in the church sought to nudge the women's society to merge some of their separate functions, such as their magazine, into the ULCA magazine, *The Lutheran.* This meeting was held in the building in Philadelphia owned by the Women's Missionary Society.[37] During her time serving for the Board of Higher Education, Winston also experienced the frustration of being passed over when the executive in charge of the board, H. Gould Wickey, promoted his own protégé and this created a leadership climate that pushed Winston to the margins. Winston complained about this in a 1959 letter to a friend, Bob, who was a pastor in NYC.

> We just had a staff meeting to talk about staff relationships. The entire staff was present. We talked a good deal about organization especially as related to the church as a whole and inter board relationships. We said practically nothing about interpersonal relationship in the staff – except a strong statement by Dr. Wickey on my age. … The actual tension is between two philosophies of organization – 1. the power and authoritative concept; 2. The horizontal or cooperative method. In a small organization I believe the latter is the only method. This, of course, is almost an impossibility at present… [38]

In the archives, alongside the papers of Mildred Winston are the papers of H. Gould Wickey, her boss, on horizontal shelves. Winston understood that there were different ways of leading and participating in the church, and her succinct explanation of them is not foreign or irrelevant to the problems of missionary inflected Christendom. There will be problems for mission if the power and authoritative method of leadership is chosen.

Success needs succession

Lutheran churches have been along for the disquieting declension of religious adherence and denominational relevance in our society. Merger initiatives among ecumenical Lutherans held the promise of uniting American Lutherans into one church, capable of commanding the attention of a national audience supposedly eager for the distinctive Lutheran witness for our times. Ecumenical pioneers urged that the unification process could go even further and join Lutherans into a wider fellowship where the unique capacities of Lutheran theology—both traditional and reform minded—would create a bridge for Christians across their boundaries. The hoped for unity has not led to vibrancy. Neither have isolationist Lutherans retained their numbers in this time of declension.

Women joining the WMS and extending their "household" imagination to Christians far overseas gives us a picture of bridging capital that resulted in real relationships, even friendships, that were cross-cultural. The future of missions in any context will depend on fostering relationships, and these should be, as Mildred Winston observed, horizontal.

Robert Putnam's observation in *Bowling Alone* that to have good bridging capital, you must have good bonding capital, may be a diagnostic key.[39] Lutherans created strong ties with each other through working together and deepening relationships. Women joining the WMS and extending their "household" imagination to Christians far overseas gives us a picture of bridging capital that resulted in real relationships, even friendships, that were cross-cultural. The future of missions in any context will depend on fostering relationships, and these should be, as Mildred Winston observed, horizontal. Lutherans seeking a way to be in relationship in the time after Christendom's authoritarian ethos has passed can expect that attitudes and aspirations for friendship can be nurtured and not discouraged by the seeking openings that are there for us enter. Bonds of friendship enable extraordinary cooperation, and foster trust and the capacity to take risks.

36. Winston papers, Women in the ULCA file.
37. Winston papers, Women in the ULCA file.
38. Winston papers, Women in the ULCA file.

39. Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and the Revival of American Community,* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).