

Laity Minute

March 2019

Greetings! You may remember from a previous Laity Minute, the United Methodist Women will be celebrating their 150th birthday this year - March 23 to be exact. As I have reflected upon this milestone, I thought what the UMW means today. I thought about what the UMW means for the future.

Society often encourages us to look to the future. We see this in marketing and advertising all the time. "Be sure to get that insurance to prepare for the future!" or, "Eat this food so that you can stay healthy in the future!" As consumers we are conditioned to look ahead all the time. Don't get me wrong. Forward thinking is important. We should find innovative ways to solve problems. New technologies can save lives and create a better global environment for everyone.

But, wait. What about the past?

My students often ask me why in the world they should study or even care about the past. "Why does the history of marketing matter?" they ask. Well, history can teach us so much. It can teach us where we have been, what was successful, what mistakes have been made, and can be a guide for us as we progress. The same can be said for the history of the UMW.

The UMW is so fully committed to serving others and supporting the organization that sometimes we forget to stop and remember the history of the organization. I recently read a quote from Gerda Lerner's work, "Why History Matters." It states: "When women discover their history and learn their connectedness to the past into the human social enterprise, their consciousness is inevitably and dramatically transformed. This experience is for them transcendent, and it enables them to perceive what they share and always have shared with other women. This is true, but perhaps it will also be a transcendent experience to discover what sets United Methodist women apart."

Learning the stories of the past can be transformative to our lives today. Imagine when one of the co-founders of the UMW traveled to India in 1869 to provide healthcare to those in need. Can you imagine her story? What could her story teach us today?

Since the beginning, the UMW has often stepped out of cultural norms. We have advocated for sometimes unpopular cultural issues. We have stepped into roles that were not traditional for women at the time. What can these actions from our past tell us about our vision and mission today?

The UMW before us showed bravery, compassion, strength and perseverance. "Our work is not just about service, it's about worship, it's about standing up, stepping up to make our voices heard," wrote Harriet Olson, UMW CEO in 2013. Those traits still live on today.

Currently, as the UMW works diligently on inequality, education, climate justice and other issues, we can, at the same time, pause to remember those amazing women who started it all. Thank you, Lois Parker. Thank you, Clementina Butler. Thank you, Dr. Clara Swain, Isabella Thoburn and Lizzie Hoffman. Thank you to the countless other women from our past who still influence and motivate us. We wish you a very happy 150th birthday and thank you for creating a history that continues to inspire us now and always.