

Faith • Hope • Love in Action

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Information gleaned from UMW website, UMW installation services, sample orders of worship

Other resources: Ministry Matters, Wesley sermons, Leading Worship class materials

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The Rev. John Wesley put faith into action in daily life. Wesley elaborated a theology that emphasized “works of piety,” and “works of mercy.” For Wesley, these are key elements in living the Christian life and seeking personal holiness. Putting faith into action in our daily lives enables us to be the people that God intends us to be. Wesley understood the essence of Christianity to be love — which he calls, “the never-failing remedy for all the evils of a disordered world”. Love in action requires acts of charity, acts of justice, and sharing of resources; in other words, mission.

Missions are the human objectives by which we respond to God’s love for us. God’s mission outlives individual and denominational missions. Mission, in short, is the goal and the purpose of God for us. It does not end.

The beginning of United Methodist Women can be traced to an 1869 meeting of eight women in Boston. They gathered to learn about women’s health and education needs in India from missionary wives. These same eight women organized the Methodist Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society and sent two missionaries, Isabella Thoburn, an educator, and Clara

Swain, a doctor, to India later that same year. Since 1869 the organization has expanded :

- From Two missionaries in India to work in more than 100 countries.
- From three hundred dollars to fourteen million of dollars for the programs of United Methodist Women.
- From eight women to approximately 800,000 women in membership around the world. UMW is the largest denominational womens organization in the world.

United Methodist Women turn faith, hope and love into action on behalf of women, children and youth around the world. It is specifically charged by the church to “support ministry *with* and advocate *for* the oppressed and dispossessed with special attention to the needs of women, children and youth”.

Spiritual growth and theological development are at the core of United Methodist Women. The inward work of spiritual growth increases the outward expression of mission. With this in mind, United Methodist Women provides many opportunities for mission education through events, programs and personal study, reading programs and seminars.

United Methodist Women focuses on social issues that mostly affect women, children and youth. At this time, immigration, environment and

climate change, domestic violence and human trafficking are special focuses.

UMW supports nearly 100 National Mission Institutions across the United States, including Puerto Rico and St. Croix. They serve as community centers, women's residences, residential treatment centers, schools, colleges and universities. You might not know that one of these centers in Spartanburg — Bethlehem Center has been serving the community since 1929. I know in the past our UMW has visited the Center. I love the Center vision statement, "We envision a world in which all of God's children are recipients of the basic necessities for a fruitful and enriched life."

In all of it's work, United Methodist Women is an integral part of The United Methodist Church. It not only provides advocacy and service on behalf of women, children and youth but also takes a lead role in expanding concepts of mission for the whole church. It has faith in the future and offers hope to all of us, and demonstrates love in action.

Here in our little church, our United Methodist Women is an integral part of the Polk County community. It supports Hospice, Steps to Hope, Thermal Belt Outreach Ministry, Polk Vocational Services, on a wider range, Columbus UMW supports The Salvation Army, Red Bird Mission, The Crossnore School and Camp Tekoa. Our little group of missionaries has donated nearly \$1500 over the past year. In 2015 our Columbus UMW

contributed \$700 to the Blue Ridge District. The Western North Carolina Conference gave \$823,000 (the most of any conference in the country) and the UMW nationally gave \$14,240,000.

In Exodus 3:7-10 God speaks to those we are committed to help: "I have heard their cry... indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey."

United Methodist Women are exemplars for us all. We share a rich heritage. John Wesley's view of service is something we can strive for each day. "Do all the good you can, in all the ways you can, to all the souls you can, in every place you can, at all the times you can, with all the zeal you can, as long as ever you can."

We, as Methodists, are a faithful people born of hope. Each of us is a light of hope and ambassadors for Christ. With God's help, we will let our lights shine so that women, children and youth in our community and around the world will realize hope in their lives. We will live out the message from God we heard in Isaiah, "Behold, the former things have come to pass. Now I declare new things; Before they spring forth I proclaim them to you."

As Christians, we cannot be true to the Gospel and be indifferent to the plight of the hurting people of the earth, To be present in a community asks us to listen fully, to hear one another's stories, to respect one another's

identities and value our differences. To be in community asks us to build upon all our gifts. This diversity of gifts offers new insights, boosts our creativity, imagines new dreams and creates a renewed community. To be in community asks us to look at our own selves. To be together in this community asks us to reach across boundaries, to know when to stand up and when to step back. Knowing we are strengthened by community binds us together.

Here's a little story about faith, hope and love in action:

"Hope for the Flowers" by Trina Paulus is the story of a caterpillar named Stripe who watched fellow caterpillars climbing and stepping on and over others with no idea about what was at the top. When he asked others what was at the top, the answer was, "No one knows but it must be awfully good because everybody's going there."

Stripe tried for a while and even met a lovely female caterpillar named Yellow and they tried together and gave up together. Stripe tried again, and one day, as Yellow was waiting for Stripe to come back, she discovered a grey caterpillar struggling to get out of a cocoon. She offered to help, but the grey caterpillar said, "No, I have to do this to become a butterfly."

Yellow asked, "What is a butterfly?" The caterpillar answers, "It is what you are meant to become. It flies with beautiful wings and joins the earth to heaven. It drinks only nectar from the flowers and carries the seeds of love

from one flower to another. Without butterflies the world would soon have few flowers.”

Yellow asked, "How does one become a butterfly?" The answer was, "You must want to fly so much that you are willing to give up being a caterpillar."

It may be that we are like Stripe the caterpillar, and need to do some changing. Giving up the cocoon, what is familiar and comfortable, and becoming all God means us to be requires some intentionality on our part. We can decide to read, decide to take advantage of training and other special opportunities, decide to get involved in a ministry or an issue, decide to go on a mission.

If you go from this place and look up and see a butterfly — let that reminder you, like the butterfly, you are meant by God to be something very special with meaningful and significant tasks to do. Listen to those around you, care for them, lead them into new experiences and growth. Be a butterfly of hope in your community. Carry the seeds of love to all you meet.

Isaiah and Paul declare, this is a new day and a new creation. And Jesus tells us, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

Faith, hope, love in action — will you answer the call, will you say yes?
Will you say, yes? Will you say, yes?

Will you work for good in your community, in your country, and in your world?

Will you care for each other, especially those that are weak?

Will you listen for the Holy Spirit to guide you to use your gifts?

Will you sustain each other with daily prayer?

And will you offer your help when you see an opportunity?

We can never fail when we say yes to God.

Look to this day

for it is life

the very life of life.

In its brief course lie all

the realities and verities of our existence

the bliss of growth

the glory of action

the splendor of achievement

For yesterday is but a memory

And tomorrow is only a vision.

But today well lived

makes every yesterday a dream of happiness

and every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Such is the salutation to the ever new dawn.

Please take your bulletin home with you. And upon awakening tomorrow morning and every morning until we gather again next week, read this benediction out loud, so that the world will hear you. [Read the Benediction] Let us leave this place with a song in our hearts — This is the Day of New Beginnings page 383.