

INTRODUCTION

This year Women's Ministries celebrates 20 years as a department of the world church of Seventh-day Adventists. Yet there is a history to this department that goes beyond the 20 years, a history that tells of struggle, determination, joys and some sorrows, as well as praise for God's guiding hand in the life of this department.

As we celebrate the historic vote at the General Conference Session in Utrecht, Netherlands in 1995 to establish the Department of Women's Ministries, we do not want to forget the women and men who made that vote possible.

Long before the official vote in 1995, the work of women's ministries began in the North American Division. This brochure documents the history leading up to the vote at Utrecht and those whose vision laid the groundwork for the work of women's ministries that is now flourishing around the globe.

CONCLUSION

And so women's ministries continues a journey begun in 1898. Ellen G. White encourages us with these words from *Evangelism*, p. 464:

"The Lord has a work for women as well as for men. They may take their places in his work at this crisis, and he will work through them. If they are imbued with a sense of their duty, and labor under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they will have just the self-possession required for this time. The Saviour will reflect upon these self-sacrificing women the light of his countenance, and will give them a power that exceeds that of men. They can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their labor is needed."

God's call to Adventist women is clear and sure. Since 1995 we continue to work in varied ministries to touch the hearts and lives of those who need to know the Gospel message. God is our strength, our guide, and our joy, and we look forward to the day when this work will be ended and we see Him face to face. Until then, Adventist women globally will work with our brothers in every field of service where we are needed.



WOMEN'S MINISTRIES:

THE EARLY DAYS

20TH ANNIVERSARY 1995-2015



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1898

Ellen G. White encouraged Mrs. S.M.I. Henry (Sarepta Miranda Irish Henry) to begin a “Woman Ministry.” Though living in Australia at the time, Ellen White’s letters to Sarepta Henry reveal her support for the work of women in the Church:

“I have thought, with your experience, under the supervision of God, you could exert your influence to set in operation lines of work where women could unite together to work for the Lord. There certainly should be a larger number of women engaged in the work of ministering to suffering humanity, uplifting, educating them how to believe—simply believe—in Jesus Christ our Saviour” (*Evangelism*, p. 462).

Sarepta Henry resigned her position as national evangelist for the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and, on March 30, 1898, she was given a ministerial license by the General Conference (GC) to begin the work of ministry to women.

1985

March 18 – The General Conference Commission on the Role of Women (GCCRW) met, including delegates from the world field. This international commission recommended that an affirmative action plan be developed to improve women’s involvement in the Church.

July – A vote at the GC Session in New Orleans approved “affirmative action” for the involvement of women in the work of the Church as a priority plan with Church leadership, and requested that leaders use their executive influence to open to women all aspects of ministry in the Church that did not require ordination.

October – The General Conference Women’s Ministries Advisory (GCWMA) was established with Betty Holbrook as chair.

1989

March 1 – Dr. Rosa Banks succeeded Warren Banfield as Director of the NAD Office of Human Relations. “Forgotten Heritage,” an editorial in the *Adventist Review*, summarized the work of Sarepta Henry and called for the establishment of a women’s ministries department.

March 19 – Summit for leaders of nine Adventist women’s groups met at the invitation of the NADWC and voted to call for a full-time women’s ministries director at the North American Division.

July 12-17 – GCCRW met in Cohutta Springs, Georgia. Karen Flowers, chairperson, presented the findings of “The Role of Women in the Church: An International Survey of Seventh-day Adventist Women in Leadership.” The

57-page document presented a profile of 875 respondents from all divisions of the world church and summarized their concerns. In conclusion the GCCRW made the following recommendation: “We recommend the employment of Women’s Ministries coordinators to coordinate ministries for all Adventist women, both lay and denominational employees, (A) full-time at the GC and division levels and (B) at least half-time at unions and conferences.”

July 23 – Under the leadership of Dr. Rosa Banks, OHR Director, NADWC met at Camp Hope, British Columbia. Each union in NAD was represented and voted to affirm the above recommendations, especially emphasizing that their division elect a director for women’s ministries.

1990

June 12 – Karen Flowers, GCWMA chair, introduced the proposal for a full-time women’s ministries director to GC officers. No action was taken at that time.

July 5-12 – GCWMA sponsored a booth at the GC Session in Indianapolis. Women’s ministries was not discussed at this session.

July 12 – GC President Neal C. Wilson and Karen Flowers initiated the President’s Honor Roll. Each division president was asked to select a woman to represent the Adventist women throughout the division who supported the Church with outstanding contributions.

September 24 – Thirty-five women representing various groups met in Pennsylvania to ask the Church to appoint a full-time director of women’s ministries with fully-funded budgets at all levels of the Church.

September – Elizabeth Sterndale was elected by the NAD Executive Committee as Field Secretary and accorded officer status as coordinator of NAD Office of Women’s Ministries.

October 4 – GC Annual Council accepted the following recommendation from President Robert Folkenberg:

WHEREAS, Everyone needs affirmation of personal worth and the value the Church places on the individual’s gifts and contributions; and

WHEREAS, Women represent a vast storehouse of spiritual gifts which await full development and utilization in the accomplishment of the Church’s global mission; and

WHEREAS, Open dialogue bringing women’s perspectives to leadership will bring greater

balance and wholeness to decision-making; and WHEREAS, Women need to be nurtured spiritually, their unique needs addressed, and guided toward Christian service, it was RECOMMENDED:

1. To authorize the establishment of an Office of Women’s Ministries at the General Conference to foster ministry by women to women in the world church.

2. To ask each division to identify its degree of need for women’s ministries and find the best way to meet this need.

October 5 – Rose Otis was elected Director of the GC Office of Women’s Ministries.

November – Ramona Perez Greek was appointed Assistant Director of the NAD Office of Women’s Ministries.

1980

April – GC President Neal C. Wilson said at the GC Session in Dallas that the Church must find ways to organize and use the vast potential represented by women’s talents.

1900

January – Sarepta Henry died and, without its strong leader, the work of the nine-member Woman Ministry Committee lost momentum and ceased to exist by 1901. Although many women continued to work for the Lord with great success, the Church’s organized work for women came to an end.

1973

September – First committee to consider the role of women in the Church met at Camp Mohaven, Ohio.

1983

Under the supervision of Warren Banfield, Office of Human Relations (OHR) director, the North American Division Women’s Commission (NADWC) was founded.

1988

January – First Women’s Ministries Department was established in Oregon Conference, with Ruthie Jacobsen as full-time paid director.

March – GCCRW met again and recommended more study. GCWMA met and drafted a proposal for President Neal C. Wilson, outlining a full-time position for a women’s ministries director at the General Conference.

April – Karen Flowers was appointed chair of the GCWMA that was comprised of women in leadership at the General Conference.

August – GCWMA adopted the Mission Statement currently used by General Conference Women’s Ministries (GCWM).

1995

July – The GC Session in Utrecht voted full departmental status to women’s ministries.

July – Rose Otis was elected Director of the GC Department of Women’s Ministries.

October – Ardis Stenbakken was elected Associate Director of the GC Department of Women’s Ministries.

November – The North American Division voted to give departmental status to women’s ministries.