

Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML)

Organization and Purpose

At the national level, women in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod hoped, prayed and talked for a Synod-wide League of Lutheran women for many years. They wanted an opportunity for service in addition to that offered in their local congregation. One of the first women's mission efforts in a Lutheran church body came about because of a Pennsylvania man, Walter Gunn, who wanted to preach the Gospel to the heathen, but he had no money for an education. This situation was described to the Hartwick Synod at an 1837 meeting in New York and it was the women, not the Synod that responded. One of the women proposed they cover the costs of educating this man to be a missionary and the approval was unanimous. Each woman pledged a certain amount and promised to spread the word of this project to women in their home congregations. When Walter Gunn completed his education he became the first missionary sent out by this branch of Lutheranism.

Determined to carry on some kind of unified program, leagues were organized within their own cities and within their own Synodical Districts. Two individual societies were founded in 1852 - one in Fort Wayne, Indiana and the other in St. Louis, Missouri. Their primary purpose was to sew, mend, wash and iron for the students at the seminaries in those cities. By the 1870's pastors in the United Lutheran Church began to see how helpful women's organizations of other denominations were in promoting foreign missions and some suggested starting a similar group for Lutheran women.

The Lutheran Women's Missionary League had its "unofficial" beginning as far back as 1929 when the individual organizations in Oklahoma, Kansas, and other Midwest states joined forces at the 1929 Synodical convention. This marked the beginning of a movement that was bound to spread to wider circles and would bring into more active service a group that had otherwise been dormant in the church. The LWML received the Synodical approval at the 1941 Synodical convention in Fort Wayne, Indiana. The League became a national organization at the first Lutheran Women's Missionary League convention held at St. Stephens Church in Chicago, Illinois on July 7-8, 1942, and began to function officially on January 1, 1943. Since this time, the LWML has evolved into a synod-wide organization of women's societies within the congregations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Objectives

The objectives of the LWML include the following:

1. To develop and maintain a greater mission consciousness among the women of the Synod through:
 - Missionary Education – “Study to show thyself approved unto God.” (II Timothy 2:15)
 - Missionary Inspiration – “They said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.” (Neh. 2:18)
 - Missionary Service – “Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” (John 13:17)
2. To adopt and support missions through prayer, cooperation, and financial support, especially those projects for which adequate provision has not been made in the Synodical program.

These objectives have been zealously carried out through projects assumed by the LWML, Texas District, and through activities sponsored by the Christian Growth Committee. Following the lead of the organizing districts, a group of interested Texas women and pastors held a meeting in Waco on June 26, 1941, for the purpose of discussing a possible state organization for Texas. Steps toward organization were delayed until local societies and pastors were fully informed concerning the LWML. The District President, the Rev. E.A. Heckman, acting upon the Synod's suggestion, appointed a pastoral committee of three to assist in organizing a district Lutheran Women's Missionary League. This committee arranged for a constitutional convention to be held at Concordia College, Austin, on June 10, 1942. This, the first meeting of the LWML, Texas District, was attended by 47 delegates and 165 visitors. The group adopted conditionally a constitution that required the joining of twenty congregational societies before District organization could be operative. When the LWML, on a national level, began functioning on January 1, 1943, the Texas District practically fell in line. By March 1943, twenty-eight societies with 743 individual members had joined. The membership on June 13, 1952 stood at 153 societies with an individual membership of 4,118.

Zones

The LWML, Texas District was organized into zones by Mrs. A.E. Bruns, the first elected president of the Texas District LWML. Mrs. Bruns patterned the zoning after that of Synodical circuits in Texas, dividing the state into eleven zones and each zone was designated by number. This was reported and recorded at the convention of 1943. In 1956 the LWML, Texas District, took official action to divide the state into eighteen zones. These zones were to adopt names to replace their original number designation. Over the next several years the zone count continued to rise and by 1976 (and still present today) the zone count remained at thirty zones.

Officers

During the first three years of the existence of the LWML, Texas District, 1942, 1943, and 1944, officers were elected at each annual convention and served one year. However, at the 1944 convention held in San Antonio, all officers were retained to serve until the first biennial convention, making their term of office three years. In 1946 a constitutional change provided that the term of office should be two years, with the provision that no other might succeed herself, but might be elected to the same office at a later date. In 1954 another constitutional change provided that all officers shall be elected for two years and shall be eligible to not more than one re-election.

Interesting Facts

Involvement of Younger Women - By the 1970's it was becoming apparent that as the early LWML members reached their golden years, the young women of this day were not following in their footsteps in great numbers. In many societies, the majority of members were age 50 or older. To help the young women of the LCMS learn more about the LWML, it was decided in 1972 to send 3-6 copies of each *Quarterly* to every women's dormitory at Synodical colleges for placement in the student lounges. In addition, a copy of each issue would be mailed to the wife of every senior at both U.S. seminaries. A personal letter about the LWML would accompany the first issue. Societies were also encouraged to give each female confirmand a copy of the *Quarterly* – or possibly a year's subscription.

Individual Memberships – first began in the Texas District LWML in June 1954. This type of LWML membership was made available to women where there was no LWML society in their congregation.

Purple and Gold were adopted as the LWML colors by the Executive Board in 1951.

The term "Mite Box" is based on the Biblical account of the widow's mite (Luke 21:1-4). The mite box has been called "blessing boxes", "mission boxes" and "thankoffering

boxes". There was an attempt to change its name officially to the thankoffering box but this motion was defeated at the 1951 convention.

Mustard Seeds – In a letter to the editor printed in the Spring 1969 *Quarterly* it was suggested by Louise Robertson, Washington-Alaska Christian Growth chairman that "LWML women in general are doing a disservice to their sisters in Christ who work." She indicated that a "reversal of attitude" was in order and that the working woman was here to stay. Robertson continued, "We might regard the situation as a God-given opportunity. And we might also consider short, practical Bible studies for the employed woman to use on her lunch hour with a couple of fellow employees who are not necessarily Lutheran; materials for across-the-lunch-table, worker as Christian dialogue" (Taege, 1991, p. 147). The Christian Growth Committee accepted the challenge and created a series of 31 mini-studies entitled "The Joy of Being." These "Mustard Seeds" made their debut in June 1971 at the Louisville convention in a gold vinyl wallet. All in attendance at the convention received a set.

Lutheran Woman's Quarterly – the first issue was in January 1943.

The Challenge.....

Betty Duda, past President of the LWML was surprised to discover that her perception and knowledge of the LWML was not how others saw it. She was shocked to learn that many thought of the societies as a collection of "old ladies' aids", and claimed that knitting and crocheting were what the league did best. In an article in the Spring *Quarterly* (1990, p.19) Ms. Duda stated "There are those in our churches who feel the LWML is no longer meeting the needs of the women of our church. Their perception of the LWML is that of being past their prime, diminishing in size, dull meetings, only for older women, exclusive, living in the past, and not meeting the needs of Christian women today."

Is this still the perception others have of the LWML today?

What can you do, as Zone Young Women Representatives, to help "update" the face of LWML so that the description given by Ms. Duda can become a thing in the past?

PLEASE use the resources in this binder AND each other to ensure the original objectives of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League continue for generations to come. As you embark on this journey please share your progress with any of the District Committee Members so that your ideas can be shared with other ZYWRs and the transformation of the LWML can begin – with one young woman at a time!!

Departments and Standing Committees within the LWML

Christian Life Department

(Christian Life Committee)

- Plan programs, provide materials, conduct workshops and seminars to enable women of the church to grow spiritually and to become active participants in spiritual development programs
- Plan the spiritual enrichment activities of the district convention

Communication Department

(Public Relations Committee)

- Produce publicity and promotional materials relating to the program and work of the LWML
- Encourage and assist zones and societies to publicize and promote their programs and events
- Interact with synodical entities to inform them of the mission and ministry of the LWML and to develop partner relationships
- Coordinate convention publicity

(District News Staff)

- Be responsible for the official publication of the District LWML (*District News*)

Gospel Outreach Department

(Mission Advocacy and Grants Committee)

- Investigate and evaluate each mission grant presented for consideration
- Present mission grants for approval by proper synodical officials
- Prayerfully select from the approved proposals those mission grants which shall appear on the ballot
- Publicize proposed mission grants in the District News or in a direct society mailing prior to the District LWML convention
- Present impartial evaluation of proposed mission grants to the District LWML convention
- Endeavor to carry on most of the work of the committee by correspondence
- Write progress reports on adopted mission grants for the District News or for direct society mailings

(Gospel Outreach Committee)

- Encourage and equip women to personally share the Gospel with all people
- Provide suggestions and materials that will help Christians proclaim the Good News

Human Care Department

(Human Care Committee)

- Alert members to opportunities and challenges for mission service in the church, community and church-at-large
- Encourage active participation and provide materials and suggestions for mission service projects
- Serve as coordinator of the Texas District Lutheran World Relief drive in cooperation with the three synods of the Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America in Texas

Servant Resources Department

(Leader Development Committee)

- Equip and encourage women by creating, developing, and providing ideas, techniques and resources which will enable and stimulate individuals to serve in leadership positions where God has placed them
- Encourage women in established congregations, mission congregations, resident homes, on college campuses or other settings to form and/or affiliate with the LWML
- Offer assistance to zones by providing encouragement, ideas and materials for effective programming; and by providing assistance for division of, formation of, or affiliation with zones upon request, using guidelines approved by the EC, synodical circuit lines preferred
- Have the committee chairman serve as credentials chairman for the District LWML convention
- Keep a record of zones, societies, and their respective officers and/or committee chairmen
- Collect necessary statistics from zones for publication in the national and District LWML convention manuals

(Structure Committee)

- Study the District bylaws and submit to the membership for consideration proposed amendments as deemed advisable
- Receive and examine all bylaws and amendments of all zones and societies as to their essential requirements

(Committee on Young Women)

- Coordinate and publicize the Young Woman Representative program for the District
- Establish guidelines in accordance with directions of the national and district LWML for selection of qualified representatives
- Maintain a resource library of young women's Bible studies, programs and ideas
- Prepare a young woman's packet that would be shared upon request
- Correspond, as needed, with zone YWRs and zone presidents

Scholarship Endowment Fund Committee

- Establish guidelines for scholarships
- Determine the number of scholarships to be given each year; determine who will receive the scholarships, the amount of each scholarship; and the duration of the scholarship(s)
- Forward names of recipients to the District LWML EC for ratification
- Notify recipients of their awards
- Authorize and assist the Lutheran Foundation of Texas in dispensing scholarship monies
- Be responsible for all publicity for application process and for recipient announcement

Prepared by Teresa Morales and Lois Teinert, 2006/2008 Committee on Young Women