

## **THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA CONNEXIONAL WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION**

### **HISTORY INFORMATION ON THE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION**

#### **Celebrating our Heritage**

The Women's Association movement was started with pride, dignity and love and with much resolve to demonstrate independent thought and ability among women called coloured by the government of South Africa. These women claimed their space and place in God's vineyard at a time when they were generally treated as second class because of the policies and practices of racism and oppression in the country, community and in the church. The MCSA Women's Auxiliary Constitution at the time, made provision for Coloured women's organizations to affiliate under white Auxiliary Branch Presidents. The Women's Association was therefore born out of a need for equality, to celebrate gifts and talents of all of Methodist Women with dignity.

In 2016 the WA still exists as a national body constituted within the MCSA Connexional framework, but no longer only for coloured women. It continues to serve and empower in the name of Jesus Christ. It currently co-ordinates 111 branches in 5 WA Districts i.e. Northern; Cape of Good Hope; Grahamstown; Kimberley- Namibia- Bloemfontein (KNB) and Queenstown. Activities are aligned to the Mission Imperatives of MCSA.

The WA logo combines the Wesleyan shell in gold on a white background with a blue trim. While the WA has its own badge, it does not have a formal uniform although branches are free to decide on dress code. The WA Motto is BY LOVE SERVE YE ONE ANOTHER.

Districts host Annual Conventions while Connexional Conventions are held biennially. Members pay annual subscription fees and make financial contributions based on branch programmes. Branches contribute to sponsored funds for WA Ministries. Fund allocations also go to MCSA and World Federation of Methodist Women.

#### **Historical Overview**

1. The first recorded meeting of the Methodist Women in the Transvaal Province (Gauteng) was held in Berea in 1907 concerning the possibility of organising the work of women in the various Methodist Churches. The outcome of a similar Pretoria 1908 meeting resulted in a united organisation of isolated branches called the Transvaal Methodist Women's Association.

Between 1923 and 1948 our founders, who attended Methodist Churches in the Coloured Circuits of the Transvaal where they lived, belonged to the Transvaal Methodist Women's Association. Among the first Branches were Anderson Street, Vrededorp, Fereirastown and Sofiatown. The District report referred to them as Cape Coloured Branches.

In 1950 the Methodist Conference accepted the Transvaal Methodist Women's Association.. The first WA District executive was formed in the Transvaal under the leadership of Mrs Josephine Mehl, Secretary was Mrs Dolly Triegaardt. More branches affiliated.

2. In South West Africa, (Namibia) families who had moved there during 1921 from the Eastern Cape, founded the Rehoboth Methodist Church. In 1932 the Koopmansrus Branch was established by Mrs R Scheepers. Other branches formed and developed.

The South West African branches later affiliated to the Cape of Good Hope District Women's Association.

3. In some Cape Province Methodist Churches, coloured women worked together in groups called Classes, Guilds, League of Chums, Bright Hour or Prayer Groups, e.g. in Wynberg. In 1939 a prayer group was formed under the leadership of Mrs Lydia Creed. In 1947 one name "The Women's Association" was chosen for these groups. Thereafter a constitution was prepared.

Prior to 1947 nine branches disaffiliated from the Women's Auxiliary to become branches of the Women's Association.

The first Cape District President, Mrs Winnie Schlosz-Petersen and Secretary, Mrs Sophie Lowe were later also elected as the first General Connexional President and Secretary respectively.

At a special meeting in April 1949 in Cape Town where representatives attended from the Cape Peninsula branches, the Women's Auxiliary representatives offered their wholehearted support to the Women's Association being formed as a separate organisation. 1950 Conference gave the approval for a District Women's Association to be established. In March 1951 the first Annual Cape District Meeting was held in Salt River.

Women from the Namaqualand Methodist Mission also formed Women's Associations and affiliated to the Cape District WA.

4. In the Eastern Cape the coloured church women decided that they should become an organisation on their own. Prior to 1950 some coloured women belonging to the Women's Auxiliary were observers at District Meetings and could not hold office as Branch Presidents. Coloured women were affiliated to the Women's Auxiliary.

Grahamstown District Chairman, Rev A Garrett, gave permission for an independent Women's Association. The first Grahamstown District Meeting was held in 1953. The first District President was Mrs Evelyn Archilles and Secretary Mrs K Bruiners. The Mission work of Evangelists Lindoor and Boer assisted in the rapid growth of the District. More branches affiliated.

5. In Queenstown when the St John's Church was inaugurated in 1933, the coloured women worshipped with the Women's Manyano sisters, they wore the traditional uniform of the Women's Manyano on Thursday afternoons. These women later joined the Women's Auxiliary but in 1954 became the first branch of the Women's Association in Queenstown and were recognised at the MCSA 1954 Queenstown Conference. More branches affiliated. In March 1960 the Connexional President (Mrs D Triegaardt) attended the inauguration of the first Queenstown WA District President, Mrs Florrie van Heerden and Secretary Mrs Sannie Wyngaardt.

6. During the 1959 Methodist Church Conference in Kimberley, Connexional Women's Association President, Dolly Triegaardt and Secretary Alice Rhoda encouraged women in the Kimberley District to affiliate to the Women's Association. In 1959 the Bloemfontein Branch was inaugurated. The Kimberley/Bloemfontein District of the Women's Association affiliated to the WA Connexion in 1960. Rev. W. Illsley, chairman of the KNB District inducted the first District President, Mrs Ethel Isaacs and as Secretary Mrs. E. Geduld. Other branches were established over the years. Namibia Circuits of the MCSA became part of the Kimberley/Bloemfontein District in the 1990's. The Namibian branches had disaffiliated from the Cape District Women's Association in 1985, when South West Africa became an independent country.

## **Vitalizing Our Witness and Services**

As a mission organization the Women's Association has based its activities on its Ministries which are aligned to the current five Mission Imperatives of the MCSA as follows:-

### **1. Spirituality**

Annual themes chosen by Districts based on the MCSA Vision and Mission help to give guidance to branches on aspects for spiritual growth and development.

Initiatives are supported which promote spiritual welfare for individuals and groups with specific needs (e.g. targeting seafaring seamen, people in prison, sick people, sorrowing people, women in crisis, youth with problems). Prayer vigils are held with other denominations uniting in prayer for our world, country, leaders and communities.

Social issues have challenged our spiritual response as Christians e.g. women abuse, broken marriages, crime, substance abuse.

External courses such as Alpha Courses, Emmaus Walks and other spiritual workshops, retreats, spiritual walks, prayer journals, prayer vigils and the MCSA calendar are promoted as tools that assist members' personal spiritual journeys. Over the years the WA has developed liturgies for women's worship services and literary aids to assist members in personal spiritual growth.

Annual Conventions are used for spiritual formation and evangelism: literature and visual aid resources, personal testimonies shared. The spiritual needs expressed by the 2016 Biennial delegates resulted in introducing a healing service in the Convention programme.

Many members have their own social problems and struggles, e.g. with children and husbands who have succumbed to abuse of alcohol and drugs. The WA provides a place of spiritual support and upliftment to help members keep focussed on Jesus.

The themes of the various World Federation of Methodist Women and World Methodist Assemblies and Area Seminars have had a significant impact on the spiritual formation of WA members attending and giving feedback to branches.

Opportunities to travel to different WA Districts in South Africa have given members exposure to a wider spiritual context as emerging church and community leaders.

### **2. Development & Economic Empowerment**

The Ministry of Women's Empowerment is aligned to this Mission Imperative.

Awareness, and information is spread at meetings about economic social and health issues. The use of social media also promotes techno literacy for members to communicate with each other and with postal members. Members are encouraged to participate in the activities of the wider church and explore opportunities for their growth and development for leadership and group facilitation. Opportunities and support are provided for confidence building within branches.

WA programmes over the years have included development of creative skills towards income generation for economic empowerment. Examples are: knitting, crocheting, sewing, fabric painting, embroidery, hat making, ceramics, mosaics, painting on porcelain, decoupage, handmade greeting cards, and floral art. These have resulted in floral arrangements and banners for churches, clothes for fund raising, fashion shows and exhibitions and also generate income for the members and family needs. Fundraising initiatives have helped members to develop administrative and accountability skills which benefit the local Branch, Church and especially the individual in being able to organise and run projects in communities. Shared catering recipes in WA programmes have contributed toward members using baking and jam making as income generating skills and training other women. The WA also produced cookery books for sale. Some members presented workshops at Women's Conferences e.g. WFM&UCW Assemblies. Various members have engaged in counselling training and are able to provide services to local Church programmes like drug counselling.

Throughout the Connexion our members have participated in the life of local churches even assisting to sew clerical attire like preaching gowns for our ministers. Prayer shawls and prayer blankets are often made as love gifts given to honour members on special occasions. At the 2016 Biennial 6 Women Ministers received Commemoration Stoles designed and crafted by WA members in celebration of 40 years of Ordination of Women in Ministry.

### **3. Evangelism & Church Growth**

Reaching out and bringing people into the Kingdom of God is the call to which every WA member is empowered and inspired. Annually the branches facilitate WA Sunday services and participate in Women's Sunday.

Evangelism has been evident in outreach visitations to institutions like hospitals, schools, prisons, house visitation to families, the needy, the aged, the sick, and bereaved persons. These visits often combine pastoral care and issuing of Bibles, food parcels, groceries, toiletries and general goods collected by members. Visits would include preaching, Bible study, and testimony witness.

Some WA members have become local preachers, deaconesses, Bible Women, Ordained Ministers, Lay Leaders, Circuit and Society Stewards.

Members engage in community ecumenical activities among women of diverse cultures and racial groups. Services for Christian Unity; combined local Worship Services, Interdenominational weeks of prayer, World Day of Prayer are attended. The Connexion benefited from Sybil Braam's sterling representation on the SA National World Day of Prayer Committee;

Ministry to schools has been undertaken where prayers are held for educators and learners, and soup and sandwiches are served with the Word of God. Counselling and guidance for youth has been provided in outreach programmes.

### **4. Education and Christian Formation**

Various forms of Ministries among children, young persons and women have been promoted and supported by the WA in different communities and institutions. These include material and financial

assistance and physical presence, serving on committees or giving practical assistance on site e.g. building assistance, fundraising or standing in for staff voluntarily at children's homes. Throughout the Connexion many pre-schools, crèches and aftercare centres have been initiated or assisted as projects by WA Branches using local church facilities as venues.

Support to needy learners has been given by supplying school uniforms and stationery or assisting to pay for school fees for learners. Support at schools has been given by going in to pray with learners, educators and parents. Special worship services were arranged for matriculants.

Focusing on the needs of youth, the WA has participated in the organisation and facilitation of workshops to discuss relevant topics (e.g. of purity, HIV, honouring one's body, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse and youth rebellion, career guidance, CV writing and job interviews, emotional wholeness, spirituality, physical health and personal integrity). Junior and Young Women's Association Branches were also established in some Districts.

District bursary funds assist indigent students. The Connexional WA also passes on collected funds from Districts to the MCO. Beneficiaries are Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary; Education for Ministry & Mission Unit; Pastoral Ministries (Order of Deacons, Order of Evangelism & Bible Women); Disaster Fund and Child Care Ministry.

Since the 1960's the WA has also been influenced, through World Federation of Methodist Women. Enid Fourie was the first WA member to attend an Assembly as well as the World Methodist Conference, (1961 Oslo, Norway). Thereafter World Federation became alive for the Women's Association, which resulted in groups of members attending subsequent Assemblies. In Kenya in 1986 Lorraine Solomon was elected as World Secretary. The 12<sup>th</sup> Assembly was held in South Africa in 2011. The Local Arrangements Committee consisted of Thenjiwe Mncube the Area President, the Women's Association, Women's Auxiliary, Women's Manyano, the African Methodist Episcopal and United Methodist Churches.

WA members attended the 13<sup>th</sup> World Assembly in Houston, Texas in August 2016 where Cathy Robyn was one of the nominees as World Secretary.

The WA also participated and benefited from programs of the Women's Network of the MCSA, which sadly closed in the 1990's. The work in the Network of Enid Fourie, Jean Fisher and their team was highly commended by the WA.

Over the years WA members assisted in administrative and workshop programmes of various Assemblies in different countries, e.g. Singapore, Brazil, and South Africa.

Moreen Hendricks was elected as South and East Africa Area President in 1976. The first Area Seminar was held in Johannesburg in 1979. Subsequent Area Seminars were held in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

The WA affiliation to WFMW has provided many opportunities and exposure for extension of christian formation and personal development of WA members.

## **5. Justice, Service and Reconciliation**

The WA Ministry of Social and Moral Care includes much of our work in line with this MCSA mission imperative.

Visits to institutions where societal needs are met collectively, included hospitals, old age homes, children's homes and prisons. Of note are the years of evangelism of late Mother Margaret Pijoos a WA member in the Queenstown District, who worked tirelessly to tell prisoners that God loves them.

Branches throughout the Districts have been actively involved in meeting the spiritual and material needs of indigent persons by reaching out to families in need, children, adults and the aged in distress, working toward the dignified and respectful treatment of persons in local communities and to institutions. Community outreach is in the form of giving and serving. Numerous activities illustrate the work that continues to be done. (e.g. Baby bottles and supplies, bread, food parcels, clothing, school uniforms and stationery, cash donations, blankets, free taxi services for seniors, soup kitchens, assistance with funeral arrangements, gifts and love boxes, the supply of material assistance where family homes were burnt, the combined effort of the One Million cents project, and the home based care services to cancer and Aids sufferers and affected families; liaison with Reach for a Dream for child cancer patients to receive their wish, wheelchairs, blanket making projects, and engaging in the Mandela Day Campaign).

Recently "Jerusalem my Happy Home" and the, Chrissie Charles Cancer Fund were initiated in the Grahamstown District as WA legacy projects.

Towards justice and reconciliation awareness was raised on issues relevant to the needs of South African communities on various topics. The outcomes have resulted in WA facilitating programmes including community marches; rallies; protests; demonstrations; seminars and conferences involving the Church and communities. (Topics e.g. Children and Drugs; Legal rights for Women; Need for insurance; Housing, shelter for abused women, Teenage pregnancy; Legal economic and social disabilities of women; Special needs of rural women; Family and Law; Parenting; The effect of Urbanization; The place of Religion in the family; Women and substance abuse, crime; HIV/Aids awareness; Substance abuse; Domestic violence; Rape; Rural women and more).

16 Days of activism against abuse of women and children and Thursdays in Black are observed toward seeking justice for women in South Africa and internationally. WA sent clothing to Rwanda after the genocide and supported campaigns like "Bring back our Girls" in Nigeria.

Belonging to the wider sisterhood of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women created a platform where Social justice issues were highlighted through our international links and helped to raise awareness at the United Nations. When Mrs Enid Fourie of the Women's Association, Mrs Grace Mokitimi, Women's Manyano and Mrs Helene Stephenson Women's Auxiliary attended the 2<sup>nd</sup> WFMW Assembly, then only, the World Federation discovered that there were more women's organisations than only the Women's Auxiliary in the South Africa Methodist Church.

WA was represented on the National Council of Women by Mrs Winnie Schlosz-Petersen and Mrs Priscilla Dilner. Other lobby groups and individual WA members like Petronella van der Straat will not be forgotten for their bold protests to focus the MCSA's attention on the call to unite the three Women's Organisations.

Visits of World Officers to SA gave our members hope in the dark days of Apartheid. The Women's Association members also hosted and exposed living conditions to Officers of the World Federation and World Methodist Council providing them with insight so that, (along with other inputs), they could influence international pressure on appropriate political avenues toward a democratic South Africa.

### **Growing our Mission**

A major challenge faced was the relocation of communities under the Group Areas Act. Families moving to new underdeveloped geographical areas not only split branches of the Association, but forced members to reorganise and regroup in new areas. The focus of the branch programmes shifted toward raising funds for new local church buildings.

Other challenges facing members have mainly been economic and social. Many members rely on public transport to get to or from meetings or programmes. Meeting at night, after a day's work, impacts on personal time and personal safety. Saturdays are therefore preferred.

Many branches have already celebrated 50<sup>th</sup> year anniversaries of existence. Aging members cannot always work as before. Some branches face the challenge of closure. Despite a decline in membership over the past decade the WA has seen a spurt of interest in the last two years with young women becoming members and adherents as evidenced at the 2016 Biennial Convention.

There has always been a good working relationship between the Women's Auxilliary, Women's Manyano and Women's Association. Over the years joint presidents' meetings were held and joint projects undertaken by the 3 groups.

The Women's Association made an intentional resolution in the early 1980's to work toward the formation of a united Methodist sisterhood in unity with the Women's Auxiliary and Women's Manyano. The three sisterhoods however still exist separately, although not on racial lines. The Women's Association is of the opinion that factors related to historical structural identity, and institutional practices present challenges to unity in 2016.

Acknowledgement is noted to all who have participated in and contributed to the WA history. We salute and honour our oldest living members in 2016 in each WA District, Mothers who attest to the work and witness of the WA over the years. Are;

Gertie Malan	100 years	Cape of Good Hope District,
Lisa Marais	98 years	Northern District,
Gladys Stilwane	92 years	Grahamstown District
Betty Hector	91 years	Queenstown District,
Clara Jansen	90 years	Kimberley, Namibia & Bloemfontein District.

At WA 2016 Biennial a "Timothy program" was initiated where the youngest delegate of each district worked in partnership with Past General Connexional Presidents on the Listening Committee producing the 2016 Resolution on the work of God for the term 2016-2018.

### **Vision**

As Methodist women the WA still has a role in the empowerment and support of women especially in geographical areas, which still carry the scars of our wretched apartheid past and the scourges of SA's current socio economic problems. There would be more strength to address these through

unified actions of existing MCSA mission organisations. The challenges which face unity could be addressed by intentionally working together.

Compiled by History Working Committee 2016  
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### **Acknowledgements**

Information taken from:

1. Many personal (some handwritten) reports by our Women's Association Stalwart's
2. Research templates of the WA History Project 2015/2016 received by WA History Task Team
3. Historical documents received from the five WA Districts
4. Methodist MCSA Yearbook 2016
5. Connexional and District WA reports
6. The Women's Auxiliary for historical information from a book "Facing the history of the Women's Auxiliary north of the Vaal River 1907 to 2004 written by Eleanor McCormick