

The Agency of Women in Methodist Church Nigeria, 1962-2012

Opeyemi Wemimo Adedoyin

*Department of Religion & African Culture
Adekunle Ajasin University,
Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria
opemoraks@gmail.com*

Abstract

The participation of women in church polity has faced major contentions over the years resulting in the need for women to establish a niche within the church to fully express themselves. This study examines the agency of women in Methodist Church Nigeria, Ibadan district, from 1962-2012 with the aim of collectively turning around long years of limitations and establishing a consistent contributory role for women in the district, national, and global levels of the church. It employs phenomenological approach and utilizes interview and participant observation methods to elicit relevant information on the contributions of women in the Methodist church over the years. The paper establishes that women in Methodist Church Nigeria have been able to mobilise and utilise their collective strength through the Women's Work Department for developmental and sustainable action. It recommends that women in Methodist Church Nigeria should leverage on their previous contributions to make better evaluation for future achievements.

Keywords: *Methodist Church Nigeria, Women's Work Department, Religious Women Agency, phenomenology, women participation*

Introduction

The church has over the years been divided on the opinions of the society, which is influenced by culture and tradition on the place and assessment of women in the church. Studies in history have also shown that given this influence, the contributions of women have frequently been overlooked in the historical narratives of the church, especially the absence of contributions of women missionaries in the mission churches¹. The silence on the roles of women therefore calls for a re-evaluation of history, especially that of the church to bring to focus the roles and contributions

of women to the growth, development, and making of the history of the church.

Methodist Church Nigeria is classified as a mission church². Research reveals that despite the various challenges confronting women, women in Methodist Church Nigeria and in specific, the district of Ibadan, have been able to establish their prominence leveraging on their collective numerical strength. These activities, seen in this study as contributions, cover various aspects, such as ecumenism, education, missions, medical/health care, and social welfare or empowerment programmes³.

Women in Methodist Church

Methodism began as a result of the religious experience of John Wesley⁴. It did not start as a church but a club in the Oxford academic community. It was not long that those around tagged them 'Methodists' because of the way they expressed their Christian duty and rituals (Harmon, 1985)⁵. Methodism got to Nigeria through the activities of Thomas Birch Freeman around Badagry in 1842⁶. From there, Methodism spread to all other parts of Nigeria.

In Methodist history, women have always been essential in each developmental stage in the Methodist movement. Susanna Wesley is agreed to be the 'mother of Methodism' as her idea on education and her kitchen meetings can be considered Methodist Class meeting. It would also be said that it was in her kitchen in the Old Rectory that the story of women working together in British Methodism will be told. The first Methodist class-meeting in America started in 1766 at the instigation of Barbara Heck, a woman.⁷ Despite the norm of the time, women formed a substantial majority of the early Methodists, taking on various roles as they felt called by God. In fact, first generation Methodist women rose above the stereotypical roles of attendant at meeting, listener, helpmate and mother to which they were limited. John Wesley gave considerable freedom to women such that they became public speakers of the Word of God, itinerants, and support group leaders⁸.

The Women's Work Department was established at the Headquarters in Lagos in 1972 with Sister Helen Davie as the first Conference Coordinator.⁹ The Women's Work Department was established to cater for the needs of girls, ladies and women from the diocese to the circuit and local church level, such that none in the church is neglected. The Women's Work Committee is part of the Conference committee alongside others like, Christian Social Action Committee, Men's Work Committee, Health and Medical committee, Children and

Youth Work Committee¹⁰. The Women's Work Committee deals with all aspects of work which is specifically connected with the life and mission of women in the Church.

The branches of Women's Work Department are Women's fellowship, Ladies and girls' fellowship and women associations. Methodist Women's Fellowship is the only nationally recognised women's fellowship in Methodist Church Nigeria. The Methodist Women's Fellowship Nigeria started in 1932 through the efforts of Mrs. Comfort Eugenia Anike Williams, the wife of Reverend E.E. Williams. Historical narratives recounts that after Mrs. Williams was invited to the meetings of the wives of the white missionaries, she felt that it was necessary for the same to be replicated among the wives of indigenous ministers in Lagos. The first eight women in attendance could be said to be pioneers of the Women's Fellowship in Nigeria. These included Mrs. C.E. Williams, Mrs. E.J. Dada, Mrs. Mary Pearse, Mrs. Frances Ajayi-Ajabe, Mrs. Ada Beckley, Mrs. J. Ajayi Cole, Mrs. Edwin Cole and Mrs. A.A. Oluwole¹¹. Working closely with one another, they established Methodist Women's Fellowship with all the zeal and effort they could muster to make it a success. The pride they also carried with them, ready to make impacts and show other women around them was enviable.¹² In fact, it was this pride that drew other women to action and challenged them to join the association. It started initially as a fellowship for the wives of clergy but later on became a grand fellowship for all married women in Methodist Church Nigeria.

The Women's Fellowship movement became a powerful organisation under the tutelage of Mrs. Williams and even after her demise, it still served as a standing reference to the collaborative power inherent in women. The women were very happy to be part of something aside from being the "wife of the clergy". The transformative impact of this resulted in the total mental revolution of the women then. The Methodist women's fellowship has always had at its core empowerment and over the years, large sums of money and resources have been channeled towards achieving this. The women saw themselves as agents for change, challenging structures and contributing immensely to the church and society through the years.

Methodology

This study makes use of phenomenological method of inquiry using in-depth interviews to elicit information from the women on the contributions of women in the church through the years. The population was chosen

randomly among a wide spectrum of women in the church not only those in leadership positions but those who are members of the church to show inclusivity.

The Agency approach gives credence to the agency of women in the church which sees women as actors in their own sphere not waiting around to be acted upon by the limiting patriarchal atmosphere inherent in church and society.¹³ As a framework, the agency concept offers a useful method for theorizing women's history¹⁴. In this way, specific ways in which women have been able to collectively organise themselves as activists in challenging, resisting and gaining entrance into social structures and institutions intended to be disadvantageous to them are uncovered¹⁵. This also aligns with the goals of women's history which is to restore women to history and history to women¹⁶.

An examination of the activity of women in the Women's Work Department identifies the power of collective action. The Methodist Women's Fellowship especially lays credence to what Ellen Messr-Davidow identifies as "consciousness-raising groups which were a major articulating practice in the development of the second wave of feminism from the late 1960s on"¹⁷. The history of the Women's Fellowship (which is a branch of the Women's Work Department) centred around this mobilising effect the pioneers had on the women to make an impact through transforming themselves to impact the church and society 1962-2012¹⁸. The effect of these collective transformation is what this study has examined as the contributions of women in Methodist Church Nigeria.

The Contributions of Women

The contributions of women to Methodist church Nigeria especially the district of Ibadan women includes but not limited to the following: women's work Department of the Methodist Church has been seen to have contributed in the following ways:

Clamour for the Ordination of Women

The advocacy for the ordination of women in Methodist Church can be attributed as part of the contributions of Women's Work Department based on the part played by women in general in advocating for the full right of women in the church. The history of the involvement of women in Methodism has a long history. John Wesley the founder of the Methodist movement, never showed any discrimination towards women and made sure that they were equally treated with the men. Although there were the general restrictions against women's participation in the church

during that time, John Wesley became a reformer when he opened the door for women in the Methodist movement. It was obvious that, despite the freedom John Wesley gave women in Methodism at that time, he was the only one who had that perspective to women and it was not strange, when after his death in 1791, that the Wesleyan Methodists attitude to the women preaching ministry changed and, from 1803, women were restricted to addressing their own sex¹⁹. This led to the closing of women being employed as itinerant preachers while they remained as local preachers. By the end of the 19th century, the restrictions placed on women in the church began to relax and, in 1890, the Wesleyan Deaconess Order was established to fill the need to reach out to women on the mission field²⁰.

It was noted in the reports on both the World Federation of Methodist Women's quinquennium and the 13th World Methodist Conference that there was a demand for admission of women into the ordained ministry and the fundamental human rights of all in 1976. The Conference also emphasised the need of every Christian to minister to his or her fellows²¹. In the same vein, Mrs M. A. Oduyoye presented a paper on "And Women, where do they come in?" in the 1977 conference, appealing to the Methodist Church Nigeria to stop discriminating against women but allow women to exercise their gifts just like the men²². It was then decided that the proposal for the ordination of women should be discussed at all the church levels.

In Ibadan Diocese, the Agbeni circuits accepted and approved wholeheartedly the ordination of women who are unmarried or have stopped child bearing and are also able to fulfil the constitutional conditions of the position into ordained ministry in 1977²³. The effort of Deaconess Helen Davie though not an African, is of tremendous impact in the actualisation of the commencement of the deaconess training in Methodist Church Nigeria.

The battle was won to an extent when a policy was drawn stipulating that anyone who had basic pastoral training could get into the Seminary for training. The first set of deaconesses were trained full time in Methodist Laymen Theological Institute in 1977²⁴. By 1981, the tent-making deaconesses were ordained and could be of assistance in the celebration of the Holy Communion at the discretion of the Presbyters, Bishops and Archbishops.

The Methodist Women's Fellowship reaffirms the equality of both genders in that, God created man and women equally to complement each other in the fulfilment of God's purpose of creation; God having

created man and woman equally in His own image is not limited to any one gender; discrimination against women on the ground of sex is ungodly. Methodist Church Nigeria should eliminate all teachings and practices that discriminate against women.

The relentless efforts of women within the church to contest that women also have the right to be ordained as priests and posted for full ecclesiastical duties and privileges resulted in the continual progression of the removal of forms of inequality in the church. The final battle was won when in 2023, Methodist Church Nigeria had the first female bishop ordained in person of Right Reverend Nkechi Nwosu, thus breaking the glass ceiling of limitation.

Empowerment Initiatives

Empowerment has to do with how both genders take control of their own lives. This can come in various aspects. For the women in Methodist Church Nigeria, this came first as a mental liberation pioneered by Mrs. C.E. Williams when she conceived the idea of Women's fellowship. The fact that women could do more than wait around while their men were in Synod meetings or whatever meeting was a major advancement, which was a call to do more than just being referred to as a clergy wife. The making of the fellowship opened the women up for unending possibilities which the pioneers did not know would become a great symbol today.

On the other hand, there is the actual economic empowerment. According to the United Nations, "Women's economic empowerment means ensuring women can equally participate in and benefit from decent work and social protection; access markets and have control over resources, their own time, lives, and bodies; an increased voice, agency, and meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all levels from the household to international institutions".²⁵ One of the 17 sustainable development goals is women's equality and empowerment, which works to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls in all ramifications. In order to fulfil this, programmes are organised to empower both women and girls with sustainable skills to make a change. Various skills are learnt so that the women can be financially independent. All the Methodist Churches are encouraged to initiate projects to raise funds for their dioceses and the church at large. It is not strange to see projects sponsored or initiated by the women's fellowship, or the various women's associations in the church.

Empowerment has to do with both men and women taking control over their lives: setting their own agendas, gaining skills, building self-

confidence, solving problems, and developing self-reliance. Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.²⁶ Any activity that is focused at bringing empowerment, awareness creating and wealth generation should be assessed and brought to a focal study. The women's fellowship has engaged in sustainable development goals by encouraging each diocese to engage in activities and projects in fulfillment of these goals.

During the Methodist Women's fellowship conferences, questions on strategies employed by each Dioceses in the eradication of poverty are usually asked with the aim of encouraging the initialisation of empowerment and income generating initiatives. This is also in compliance with the action plan of the World Federation of Methodist & Uniting Church Women's²⁷ action plan for millennium development goals (MDG). On the community and church level, Methodist women set up programmes to train mothers in simple skills to earn an income for instance, making crafts, hat making, tie and dye, flower gardening and sell flowers, set up intercessory prayer groups to pray for the poor and to visit them with Christ's message of hope.

Empowerment programmes are not alien in the operations and plans of the women's fellowship in the various diocese and circuits and local churches. This is done periodically, and women are assisted start-up money and equipment needed to start up after training them in their chosen skill. The Women's Work Department also aids these empowerment initiatives for women at the national levels as well. For instance, the women in the Diocese of Ibadan were taught the rudiments of fish farming through the seminar, which held at the Institute of Church and Society in Samoda, Ibadan.²⁸ Other empowerment initiatives are fashion design, soap making, disinfectant making, hat making, tie and dye, beads, and crafts. There might be no comprehensive list to record those who have participated in the empowerment programmes over the years in each diocese to the local church levels, but over the years there has been no one that did not participate or benefit from the empowerment programmes especially since the official commencement of the empowerment centre in the Diocese.²⁹ Several sewing machines and sewing materials were given to various women and the young girls in the church to aid them in starting up. Mrs. Ladigbolu shed more light on the empowerment programmes organised by the churches in the Diocese of Ibadan:

The Diocese of Ibadan encouraged the ladies and girls Fellowship in Self Employment Training Scheme (SETS) in 1993-1999. SETS was a scheme aimed at self-empowering girls and ladies with skills. Ladies and girls were gathered from all the circuits and taught skills like soap making, *adire* making, tie and dye making. The women's Fellowship makes all the materials available to them to learn and at the end of the training, money is given to them to start on their own.³⁰

The Diocese of Ibadan is reported to have trained at least 25 people both women and ladies in the concept of hat making as part of the skills acquisition programme organised by the Diocese in 2009.³¹ There are also several circuit empowerment-based initiatives as well such as setting up members on petty trading as a means for caring for the needs of members in the church.

Mediation in Crisis Situation

Another area where women have contributed to the church was in being the catalyst for reconciliation in the church during crises. Women as effective tools in dispute resolution is one area of study that is being harnessed in peace and conflict resolution cases. This can be attributed to the easy accessibility, nurturing nature of women and aversion to suffering which counts for effective dispute resolutions during crises³². The collective action of women in cases of conflict has proven to be a very effective strategy of making their voices and opinions heard in extreme cases³³.

The crisis that hit Methodist Church Nigeria during the tussle between the patriarchal and the presidential sections shook the church to its foundations³⁴. It had tremendous impact on all aspects of the church. The Women's fellowship was not left out, during the time, as the fellowship almost become non-existent. Due to existence of factions, there was disunity among the women as they took sides with their husbands. This disrupted the orderliness and progress of the fellowship to the extent that there were no meetings during the crisis. The end of the crisis brought about the need to bring everyone together with the same focus once again. Towards this, specific women were charged with the responsibility of resuscitating the Women's fellowship. The first point of actions was carried out by specific women, who served as women work coordinators - Deaconess Rhoda-Ada James and Deaconess Kennedy Johnson. They aided and worked towards resuscitation of the women's fellowship. The

Women's fellowship was a way to reach out to the women in other dioceses and serve as a channel to preach the message of unification during the period. Having access to the ears and heart of their husbands at home, they could start the resolution from their various homes and work on their husbands who are at the fore of the crisis.

In 1988, the western sector reactivated the biennial meetings of the sector with about 150 Methodist women from the dioceses of Lagos, Ibadan, Egba-Egbado, Igbobini, Ifaki Ekiti and Patriarchal Council, and Tinubu, Lagos³⁵. The meeting took place at Methodist Girls High School, Ifaki Ekiti from 25th to 28th November 1988. A new Women's fellowship executive committee was formed, comprising Mrs D.M. Orekoya as President; Mrs G.A. Adepoju as the Vice-President, Mrs F.A. Omodunbi as the Secretary, Mrs Ebute as the Assistant Secretary, Mrs B.E. Johnson as the Treasurer, Mrs D.W. Adokun and Mrs J.O. Somekan as Auditors, and Deaconess *Olori* Yetunde Gbadebo as the Publicity Secretary. Ex-officio members were Mrs C.O. Obaba, L.M. Makindipe, F.O. Adeboyejo, Deaconess N.O. Kennedy-Johnson, C.A. Odusoga and T.O. Kuewumi³⁶.

It was during this period that the Eastern sector of the women's fellowship was inaugurated on the 19th of May 1990 at Aba,³⁷ while in the Western sector, a re-unification women's fellowship conference was held in Odo Aye circuit in the Diocese of Igbobini from 2nd to 6th August, 1990.³⁸ The resolution process started with the women through the women's fellowship.

Educational Contribution

Missionaries have over the years used education and the establishment of hospitals as part of the missionary strategy for evangelization of the world³⁹. It was discovered that through planting schools, missionaries have been able to penetrate and evangelize more locations. It has been a great aim and impact of Methodism in Nigeria in the creation of a literate nation. Although there have been many critics to the true intent of missionaries in the role of colonial administration, it is argued that they, like the colonial administrators used mission education as a means to enforce and spread the colonial mentality, placing restrictions on the extent to which Africans could think as the educational structures were to produce workers for the lower cadre administrative duties while the more expert positions were left for the British.⁴⁰ The mission education was also questioned on the ground that the sole purpose why the missions included education was simply a strategy to populate the churches, thus a church

could have plenty schools only as a ploy to get more members. Despite the many flaws of mission educational system, there are several advantages, as it ensured for a literate nation, especially reading and writing skills.

Historically, the education of girls and women were not considered priority at first because the impetus for missionary education by the churches was for evangelism and to serve as training grounds for clergy men and teachers for the churches, and since the men were needed for this, education was centred around them⁴¹. The initial population of boys to girls in the mission school was high but in later years, the need to have women in leadership positions increased, and thus the need to have girls educated. This resulted in increase in girls' population in the school. Women missionaries and deaconess were sent to the school for training of girls in home crafts and girls' education. These crafts were to serve as attraction for other girls to join the school to increase literacy among the female gender⁴².

Aside from training the children, women in the church clamoured for the training of women especially wives of ministers and the prospective wives of ministers to equip them for the work for which their husbands have been called⁴³. These trainings began in 1960 at Methodist Layman's Training Centre in Sagamu, Ogun State.

Women's work Department comprises women who are literate and enlightened in their various fields. Methodist women were called on to translate the book, "Women Priests? Yes Now!" into Yoruba language.⁴⁴ It was later recommended in 1980 that Chief Olori Yetunde Gbadebo replace the late Mrs. A.O. Latunde Dada for the Yoruba translation and that the Rev. O.U. Usoro be replaced by Mr. E.O.E. Oku for the Efik translation.⁴⁵

In fulfillment of the action plan to achieve universal primary education, the Methodist women's fellowship set up centres to promote collaborative inter-denominational aid to address needs for homework centres and parenting classes and to encourage mothers to upgrade their education so that they could understand the educational needs of their children as well as to open the church for use of local early childhood and primary schools.⁴⁶ Equal rights to quality education for every girl child is also re-emphasised as education is affirmed as the most powerful means of empowering girls socially, economically and politically.⁴⁷

The establishment of schools for learning at that time was seen as a thing of pride as even the African Christians were seen establishing Day schools. Wesley College, a training institution was opened in 1905 with 4

students (D.C. Kannmi Ologunde, J.O.K. Soremekun, A.T. Olude and Samuel Solaru)⁴⁸. At some point both the Church Missionary Society and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society joined forces in response to the demand for higher education. First, they established the United Missionary College, Ibadan, which was a teacher training college for women in 1930. Then they opened the Igbobi United College in 1932. Deaconess were sent to these female schools to teach home skills and also manage the girls from Methodist Missionary Society.

Evangelism and Church Growth

Church growth has been conceived as the science that studies the nature, function, planting, multiplication and health of churches as they seek to enforce the Great Commission globally⁴⁹. One of the known strategies for church growth is evangelism and women have through the years contributed immensely in this capacity. Women in missions is one of the major contributions of the female gender in the propagation of the gospel^{50,6} as their numerical strength is a propelling force. The 2017 constitution of Methodist Church Nigeria places particular emphasis on evangelism. Through history, women have been utilised to penetrate dangerous places for the sake of evangelism. The Women's Work Department organises evangelistic outreaches periodically to areas in the hinterlands that surrounds the diocese and local churches. These outreaches are accompanied with the distribution of various welfare supplies like food, clothing and medical aids. General evangelism is also carried out during annual conferences.

The Methodist Women's Fellowship has contributed to the growth of the church through the various programmes organised to bring in people. Since these programmes are usually not restricted to the women in the church alone, it attracts others from outside the church and subsequent membership retention. This has been a channel at which numerical growth of the church is aided. The ladies and girls fellowship also contribute to empowerment of its members from their levels by taking various skill acquisition programmes. They are taught home economics skills in making doughnuts, egg buns, bedside rugs, which are presented for sale in the church.⁵¹ Money gotten from this is used for the association's goals.

One other way the women contribute to the church growth is through marriage. Marriage is celebrated in the church as the joining of two matured persons, male and female, in holy matrimony. Marriage is one of the major ways through which new members are added to the

church especially women. There is a tradition that is done by the church. Every married woman brought into the church on the thanksgiving of their wedding ceremony is welcomed into the Women's Fellowship as a member. Programmes organised in the church by women at various times are constant avenues of contact with fresh people coming into the church. For instance, mothering Sunday, Methodist Women's Fellowship conferences, and ladies and girls fellowship conferences draw visitors who could also become members to the church for thanksgiving.

The Women's Work Department undertakes periodic outreaches in their local communities for the purpose of evangelism. Aside from spreading the good news, evangelistic outreaches and visitations are avenues for populating the church as converts are disciplined and dispatched to communities to function in church various departments.

Health Care

Medical mission was first utilized as a strategic approach to evangelism by the Medical Missionary society in China in 1838⁵². Faith based healthcare has ridden on the wings of ensuring a total and wholesome person i.e., body, mind and spirit⁵³. It is a sure way of demonstrating the love of Christ through compassion and care.

From the inception, medical care has always been a focus of the Methodist movement. According to Rowe, the building of hospitals reflected late nineteenth century Methodism's identification with scientific progress⁵⁴. The minds behind health care especially those propagated by the church had the sole intention of reaching the communities with the love of Christ especially through rural health care. The Conference Health and Medical Department was created in order to oversee all health facilities including tertiary institutions of health and social health-related centres owned by the Methodist church Nigeria⁵⁵. It is worthy to note that Methodist Hospital, Ilesha which opened in 1912,⁵⁶ was the first Methodist hospital in Western Nigeria.

In recent times, aside the building of hospitals and clinics, the church preaches self-responsibility in matters of health and care. Thus, the Women's work department organises periodic seminars at all church levels on various health issues like cancer, kidney diseases, diabetes, hypertension, heart issues and stroke, diet, care for the elderlies and general healthy living. There is no Methodist Women's Fellowship conference where health talk is not slated as part of activities. This is aimed at ensuring continual awareness on matters of health among the women most of whom are caregivers at home. Such conferences are also

sometimes sauced with medical outreaches for women and the community where the church is located. Aside this, in-house medical check-ups are usually organized for women to check their vitals.

The establishment of the Agodi local church (Cathedral of Light) clinic gives credence to the collective action of women in the church. The clinic at first was initiated by Christian Ladies women association of the church but the administration was later taken over by the local church. The clinic offers medical aids to members and the community at subsidized rates.⁵⁷ The nurses in the clinic are volunteers from Agodi local church although there are few others from other churches brought in for the purpose of service to humanity.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This paper has contributed to the discourse on agency of women in the church, precisely mainline churches to which the Methodist Church belongs. It established that women in Methodist Church Nigeria have been able to mobilise and utilise their collective strength through the Women's Work Department for developmental and sustainable action. Through this, they have been able to impact not only the church but the society in general. The various empowerment programmes, which are aimed at giving independence to the average woman to serve as a credible support to men in the homes, have served as liberation to many women. A look at the discussed contributions, clamour for the ordination of women, education, healthcare, mediation in crisis situations, empowerment, church growth, etc., cumulatively helps in the long run to promote general societal well-being and stability.

By way of recommendation, Methodist women should identify the strength of their unity and leverage it as a motivational force to propel greater achievements beyond those achieved by their predecessors. Also, Methodist Church Nigeria should look into the idea of documentation of women contributions over the years to have it stamped in writing for future generations to access either for the purpose of further academic research on activities of women in the church or for general social functions.

Endnotes

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³ This article is an extract from the researcher's doctoral thesis titled, "Women's Work Department Methodist Church Nigeria, District of Ibadan 1962-2012", defended at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State, May, 2024.

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⁵ N.B. Harmon. 1985. P.10

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⁷ In the history of American Methodism, Barbara Heck comes into prominence as she was said to have prompted Philip Embury. A local preacher, who started preaching and then a small society, was started in American. See Harmon N.B. (1985). *Understanding United Methodist Church*. Nashville. USA: Abingdon Press.

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¹⁰ Methodist Church Nigeria 2006 Constitution, Final Copy. 81.

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¹² Interview Respondent, Mrs Ola Jumoke (foundation member's daughter (Mrs. A.A. Oluwole), aged 80, Women's Fellowship member, Diocese of Ibadan, interviewed on 18/03/2018. She recounts the story of her mother, mama Oluwole who was part of the founding members of the Methodist women's Fellowship. On one Christmas celebration, it was raining heavily and the ground was muddy and red but the women dressed in white were not deterred, singing and dancing round the town happily, "*Ara ma san, aaarra ma san*", a muddling of the original song "Arise my soul, aarise".

¹³ Burke K. (2012). Women's Agency in Gender-Traditional Religions: A Review of the Four Approaches. *Sociology Compass* 6(2), 122-133.

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- ¹⁹ The Role of Women within Methodism: the Historical background. Retrieved December 20, 2024, from <https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/rylands/special-collections/subject-areas/methodist-archives-and-research-collections/using-the-collections/researching-women-in-methodism/the-role-of-women-in-methodism/>
- ²⁰ The Role of Women within Methodism: the Historical background.
- ²¹ Extracted from the Minutes of Methodist Church Nigeria of the 15th annual conference held at Emmanuel College, Ibadan, 9th-17th December, 1976.
- ²² Oduyoye M.A. 1976. *And Women, Where do they come in?* Lagos: Woodfree comm. Entreprise.
- ²³ Extracted from the Minutes of Methodist Church Nigeria of the 15th annual Conference held at Emmanuel College, Ibadan, 9th-17th December, 1976.
- ²⁴ Interview Respondent, Most Rev. Ayo Ladigbolu, aged 83 years, first Principal of MLTI, interviewed at his residence in Oyo, 9/12/2023. In this regard as well, the efforts of Sister Helen Davie is of significant importance, as she made it her life's pursuit to fight for the introduction of the deaconess order in Methodist Church Nigeria.
- ²⁵ Facts and figures: Economic Empowerment. Retrieved July 23, 2024 from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>
- ²⁶ Sustainable development. Retrieved August 25, 2021 from www.iisd.org
- ²⁷ The World Federation of Methodist &Uniting Church Women is the global association of women from the various fractions of Methodism under one umbrella.

²⁸ Interview Respondent, Deaconess Kennedy Johnson, aged 77years, National Women's Work Coordinator, Tinubu Church, interviewed 13/03/2020.

²⁹ Interview Respondent, Ayankunbi Maria, aged 70years, trader, women's fellowship president, Trinity circuit, Ogbomosho, interviewed 02/09/2018.

³⁰ Mrs. M. Ladigbolu, aged 80 years, one time women's Fellowship President, Diocese of Ibadan, interviewed on the 26/09/2020.

³¹ Methodist Church Nigeria, Diocese of Ibadan, 47th annual conference of the Women's Fellowship, themed, 'Women Making a Difference', held at the Oyo circuit between 11th-15th of June 2009.

³² Falbel R; Klepfisz I. & Nevel D. (eds.). (1990). *Jewish Women's Call for Peace: A Handbook for Jewish Women on the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict*. New York: Firebrand Books.

³³ Aba Women's Riot of 1929 see Paddock A. (2018). The Women's War of 1929. Oxford Research Encyclopedias. Retrieved December 20, 2024 from <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.271>

³⁴ In 1976, the conflict which shook Methodist Church to its root took place with major divisions between the presidential and the patriarchal factions. The crisis came to an end with the reunification conference in 1990.

³⁵ *Methodist News*. April 1989 vol.1, No. 1.

³⁶ *Methodist News* .April 1989 vol.1, No. 1.

³⁷ *Interview Respondent*, Deaconess Kennedy Johnson, aged 77years, National Women's work Coordinator, Tinubu Church, interviewed 16/06/2019.

³⁸ *Interview Respondent*, Deaconess Kennedy Johnson

³⁹ Health and Medicals. <https://www.methodistnigeria.org/arm/health-medicals#:~:text=Today%20Methodist%20Church%20Nigeria%20is.by%20the%20Methodist%20Church%20Nigeria>

⁴⁰ UK Essays. November 2018. The Role of Missionaries in Colonial African Education History Essay. [online]. Retrieved June 15, 2021 from <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/history/the-role-of-missionaries-in-colonial-african-education-history-essay.php?vref=1>

⁴¹ Mba N.E. (1982). *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965*. Berkeley: Institute of International Studies.

⁴² Archival information states the involvement of various women missionaries in the teaching of girls, in 1938, Miss W.M.Warrington arrived in Sagamu as staff in Sagamu Girls' School, under the Principalship of Miss F. Cutler; the activities of Miss A. Poole, Miss L.L. Brown, Miss Ada Smith (B.A.), Miss Y. Messenger, Miss Adebisi Abayomi, Miss Mercy Creppy (trained in UMC) in the Methodist Girls High School; Miss D.L.Sanderson who was stationed at United missionary College (National Archives Ibadan, NAI), Nigeria Record Office ECC 27/57/8205, Minutes of meeting of the missionaries of the Western Nigeria District 16th January, 1939.

⁴³ Makinde E.A. (2012). *Women as Teachers and Character Moulders: A Handbook commemorating the 8th Anniversary of Women's Fellowship in Methodist Church Nigeria 1932-2012*. **IMP**.

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- ⁴⁴ The translation was being done by Late Very Rev. E.A Omotunde, but it was recommended that Mrs W.I Sonekan and Mrs O. Latunde-Dada replace her in the completion of the work. Methodist Church Nigeria Conference Resolutions and Decisions 1963-1979. P. 8.
- ⁴⁵ Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Church Nigeria held in Methodist Theological institute Sagamu, August 19-29 1980. P.143.
- ⁴⁶ Methodist Church Nigeria, Diocese of Ibadan 50th Women's fellowship Conference report on the World Federation of Methodist & Uniting Church Women (WFMUCW), Action plan for millennium development goals (MDG).
- ⁴⁷ N/a.2017. Gender Equality: Glossary of Terms and Concepts. United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF). 14.
- ⁴⁸ Oduyoye M.A. (1992). *The Wesleyan Presence in Nigeria 1842-1962*. Ibadan: Sefer. 56-57.
- ⁴⁹ Igboin B.O. & Adedibu B.A. (2020). Christian Ethics and Sustainable Church Growth in Nigeria. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 4(5), 90-103.
- ⁵⁰ Oparinde R.O. (2023). A Historical Survey of Women in Christian Missions: Contributions and Challenges. *Light in a Once-Dark World*. 5(1), 253-265.
- ⁵¹ Methodist Church Nigeria, Diocese of Ibadan, 45th annual conference of the Women's fellowship, 2007 Report, pp.25
- ⁵² Jansen P. (2020). Health Systems strengthening through the Faith-based Sector: Critical Analysis of Facilitators and inhibitors of nationalization of mission hospitals in India. *Christian Journal for Global Health*. 7 (2), 104-119.
- ⁵³ The Essence of Christian Care in Global Healthcare Missions. Retrieved 20 December, 2024 from <https://www.medicalmissions.com/resources/78669/christian-care>.
- ⁵⁴ Rowe K.E. (2007). Temples of healing: The founding Era of Methodist Hospitals, 1880-1900. *Methodist History*. 46(1), 47-57.
- ⁵⁵ Health &Medicals. Retrieved 20 December, 2024. <https://www.methodistnigeria.org/arm/health-medicals#:~:text=Today%20Methodist%20Church%20Nigeria%20is,by%20the%20Methodist%20Church%20Nigeria>
- ⁵⁶ A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland. "Ilesha". Retrieved 20 December, 2024. <https://dmbi.online/index.php?do=app.entry&id=3348>
- ⁵⁷ Interview Respondent, Rev. Mrs. Olufunmilayo Osobu-Popoola, aged 61years, one time leader and secretary of Christian Ladies Society, Retired Nurse, Agodi Methodist Church, interviewed on 15/11/2021.