

WINTER 2009

JUST+WOMEN

EMBRACING LIFE

Finding new
beginnings

Learning to Lead

Disciples women
reflect on a visit
to Bosnia and
Croatia

NEW BEGINNINGS

STARTING
OVER

"I will do a new thing in you,
can't you see it?"—God

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CAROLINE NEVILLE PEARRE
Courtesy of Disciples of Christ Historical Society

“Yes, I will!”

Disciples women have a rich heritage of taking action toward possibilities when others are overwhelmed by obstacles. The twenty-first century certainly calls for such ability — not unlike the 1874 morning when women of the Disciples of Christ were first mightily sparked into action. The spark came through an especially humble and devout educator and minister’s wife, Caroline Neville Pearre (1834–1910).

That morning, April 10, 1874, during her devotions, Caroline had been praying with special earnestness for those in the world without the hope and love of God. The Disciples had a missionary society, but their three missions had closed for lack of support. Now, as the need seemed most urgent, donations had fallen to an all-time low. The women could make a difference, Caroline sensed, inspired by the words of Thomas Munnell, in reminding the all-male leadership of the American Christian Missionary Society that women were an untapped source of power. Lately Caroline’s prayers had focused, “Surely we could be led, if we had a leader.”

“Why cannot you do it?” came her distinct call to Caroline as she ended her devotions that day.

Caroline was well aware of reasons *why not*, beginning with the fact that she was a woman in a day when women were not allowed to vote, much less seen as able to take on most leadership roles. Many would have responded to such a call, “Yes, but ...” Caroline, however, saw obstacles of no consequence to a God who could move mountains. God would make a path for those who obediently stepped out in faith. Caroline felt a burst of joy that morning as she answered unhesitatingly, “Yes! I will!”

Caroline Pearre’s response would ignite Disciples women to form the Christian Women Board of Missions (CWBM), uniquely organized and managed by women, while serving and employing women and men. The CWBM quickly grew into one of the most successful missionary organizations in the world, becoming a \$1.5 million enterprise that reached millions of people at home and abroad for Christ. When the organization later merged with the general Disciples organization, the women’s movement continued in 1949 as the mission-minded Christian Women’s Fellowship, led Jessie Trout, a former CWBM missionary from Canada.



Soon after answering her call, Caroline wrote for permission to pursue her cause. Thomas Munnell answered in recognition, “This is a flame of the Lord’s kindling, and no man can extinguish it.” Begun in prayer, the movement of Disciples women has at its best been driven by deep faith in God and reliance in the leadership of Jesus Christ as Lord.

Women’s “weakness” became their strength — a powerful force of sisterhood networked like no others could be. Women were drawn to the spirit of birthing and nurturing what others found so difficult. They enfolded in their network those seen by others as insignificant. The “widow’s mite” offering and children’s mission groups became powerful sources of inspiration and celebration. Word of mouth and *Missionary Tidings*, a 40-page newsletter, informed the sisterhood of success and challenges, bringing an intense sense of interest, inclusion, and involvement. And as women in the movement united to embrace sisters regardless of color, race, nation, or income, boundaries began to fade and healing began.

Caroline Neville Pearre, mother of the women’s missionary movement, was soon joined by countless sisters and daughters who also stepped out to find God’s paths and make bridges, including faithful servants like Sarah Lue Bostick, Janice Newborn, Maureen Osuga, and Arlene Pimental. Who else do you know who might answer, “I will!”

DEBORAH PHELPS IS [BIO] RIT LORPEROS
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PRATET NOSTING ERAESECTET IN HENIS
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