

“HAPPY 145th BIRTHDAY, DISCIPLES WOMEN!”

Skit for KDW Retreat 2019

(Contributors: Pat Donahoo, Chesla Nickelson adapted by Jo Ann Chance, Cheney, KS)

ONE: Here we are to celebrate the “145th Birthday of Disciples Women”... but before we blow whistles, toss balloons, or eat treats, perhaps we should think about our history and the way Disciples Women began.

CNPearre: I would appreciate that, since I had some heartfelt reasons for those early days of mission and ministry.

TWO: And please tell us more about you...

CNPearre: Well, I am Caroline Neville Pearre, an educator (I taught at Christian colleges in Missouri, Kentucky, and Ohio) and a minister’s wife. We were serving a church in Iowa City, Iowa, and in my husband’s Easter message that spring in 1874, I was particularly moved as he spoke of the redemptive grace of God for all of humanity, and I truly realized that the gift of the grace of God is literally for EVERYONE! I had carried concern for quite some time that there had not been enough work done to share Christ’s Good News both at home and around the world.

ONE: But wasn’t there already the American Christian Missionary Society that Alexander Campbell had first led at least 25 years before that point in time? I think they were working in three areas overseas even in the early years.

CNPearre: You are correct, but the funds to continue supporting that early work had dwindled, so they were not functioning well. And in that Easter service, I decided that something must be done to be sure that people all over the world knew of God’s love and grace. On the next Friday morning, in April 1874, as I sat doing my daily Bible reading and prayer, the thought came to me to organize the WOMEN of the church to do this work.

TWO: That sounds familiar!!

ONE: When something needs to get done at church, the women are usually the ones to get it started!

TWO: Amen, Sister!! *(clap raised hands with ONE)*

CNPearre: After much prayer asking God to send a leader, someone to organize the women for this ministry, the question then came to me, “Why cannot you do it?”

ONE: Ahhh... JFK said, “Every accomplishment starts with the decision to try.”

TWO: Oh, well, P. T. Barnum said, “No one ever made a difference by being like everyone else.”

ONE: And there’s, “If it’s to be, it’s up to me.” BUT, we better let Caroline continue with her story!

CNPearre: Well, there were many reasons why I could not do it... Being a woman in 1874 meant that we were not allowed to vote, much less seen as able to take on most leadership roles. However, during the years of the Civil War, many of us women were raising and distributing aid to soldiers. In the process, we discovered powers that we and the nation had not known that we held. We were driven to new experiences and new sources of power...and we learned that with God, we could overcome many obstacles.

TWO: I love the quote from Winnie the Pooh: “You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, smarter than you think, and loved more than you know.”

ONE: That sure seems to fit you, Caroline!

CNPearre: Well, I and my sisters had deep concerns for humanity. I felt that the Great Commission was extended to this time in history as well as when Jesus first issued it to his disciples. We were being called to spread Christ’s teachings to all the world! So... as I prayed, I suddenly felt joy and excitement when I answered my own questions and said, “I will!”

ONE: We are certainly glad you did!

TWO: So, then what happened?

CNPearre: I was about to celebrate my 43rd birthday, but that and everything else had to wait as I began to lay the groundwork for what would later become a \$1.5 million dollar enterprise, organized and managed exclusively by women! Both men and women became our missionaries – doing all forms of mission work: educational, benevolent, medical, industrial, and directly evangelistic.

ONE: That sounds mighty impressive!

CNPeare: This was unique in that all business of the organization was managed by women who collected and disbursed the funds and also employed and directed the missionaries. This was the first organization of women doing home mission work...a relatively new idea and a new awakening to our own abilities that empowered and emboldened us to answer the call of the Great Commission.

TWO: Please tell us more about those early days.

CNPeare: I wrote letters to many leaders in the church and began strategic planning to organize so we might achieve what God was calling us to do. I even addressed a convention of men, defying tradition, urging support for foreign missions.

ONE: You go, girl!!

TWO: Later, we know, of course, the men would co-opt the organization. But you and women started it! Wow!

CNPeare: On October 21, 1874, we had our first organizing meeting of the Christian Women's Board of Missions. We made no distinction between home and foreign missions—our field was the whole world! We understood that we were all connected globally and decided to address the needs at home and around the world. Through the Board of Missions, we provided training programs that equipped thousands of young people and established four Bible Chairs at state universities, too.

ONE: Did the Christian Women's Board of Missions lead to other important organizations?

CNPeare: In 1886, another group of women in St. Louis, recognizing a need to assist poor and orphaned children, led by Mattie Younkin, began what is now the National Benevolent Association, the social services ministry of the church.

TWO: Were there others?

SLBostick: Well, let me enter the conversation if I may... I am Sarah Lue Bostick, and in 1892 I was the first African American woman to be ordained as a Christian Church minister. I was only 4 yrs. old in 1874, when Sister Caroline began this organization, but I did help found the first African American Christian Women's Board of Mission auxiliary in 1892. My husband, Mancil, and I founded the Mount Sinai Christian Church in North Little Rock, also. But I had a special interest in women which led to founding the first African American

Christian Women's Board of Missions, called in those days the NCMB or Negro Christian Missions Board, which was responsible for organizing African Americans across the country for missions.

ONE: That is quite impressive, Minister Sarah. Did you have any other special interests ?

SLBostick: Yes, I worked and networked and traveled and helped to start and continued supporting until my passing several special important ministries: the Southern Christian Institute in Mississippi, the Jacob Kenoly's Mission School in Liberia, and Jarvis College in Texas, which I helped start. In my spare time, I enjoyed making bonnets by hand, which I sold for extra money to support these ministries.

TWO: That's so interesting! Just think, we are still doing things like knitting and crocheting and tying blankets for ministries and missions yet today!

SLBostick: As I worked to establish auxiliaries across the country, I amassed a huge collection of missions literature which was preserved and donated to the Disciples of Christ Historical Society.

ONE: How wonderful! And I am certain that you dealt with sexism and racism during all your dedicated work and ministry to help people.

CNPearce: Speaking of helping people, in 1895, Nancy E. Atkinson, one of the women who worked with me to begin the Board of Missions, and her husband received news of the death of a pastor who left behind a nearly blind widow and several children with no means of support. Establishing a fund to provide support for this family was the beginning of the Pension Fund.

During the 1890's, Hispanic women in Texas began to organize within congregations and later began networking across congregations and regions. And the Board of Missions joined with interdenominational churches to provide the first college for women in Central China.

ONE: You are and were such inspirations, Caroline and Sarah!

TWO: That gives us such a wonderful sense of history and empowerment for continuing beyond this 145th Birthday.

CNPearce: I know that Disciples Women will continue to take action toward possibilities when others are overwhelmed by obstacles. Women connected together will do far more amazing ministries than

we can begin to imagine. Our so-called “weakness” became our strength—a powerful force of sisterhood connected like no other could be, to birth and nurture what others think too difficult.

SLBostick: Yes, women in this grand movement united to embrace sisters regardless of color, race, nation, or income. Boundaries began to fade, and much healing began.

ONE: I’m certainly impressed... What began in prayer has become the movement of Disciples Women at its best! We have been driven by deep faith in God and reliance on the leadership of Christ.

TWO: “Believe you can and you’re halfway there!” ...
“Every accomplishment starts with the decision to try.” ...
“Not all storms come to disrupt your life; some come to clear your path”

ONE: You are so full of quotes and sayings! But they appropriately fit us often in our mission and ministry work as Disciples Women.

CNPearre: Well, I am certainly overjoyed at the vision of what Disciples Women will continue to do as they find their voice and live out their call.

SLBostick: We were the beginning forces, but so much continues to happen as God’s work is being done by our many Sisters.

TWO: As Arthur Williams said, “I’m not telling you it’s going to be easy, I’m telling you it’s going to be worth it.”

ONE: Enough, enough! Thank you, Caroline and Sarah, for sharing with us. We now can appreciate even more our “145th Birthday” as Disciples Women! And perhaps we can all help collect an offering of \$145.00 to send in to Disciples Women in honor of this 145th Birthday.

Thank you for your prayers, vision and ministry, Caroline Neville Pearre and Sarah Lue Bostick! THANK you!

And may God bless Disciples Women everywhere, now and always.