

**2011 Call to Prayer and Self-Denial Program Resource Sheet**  
**“Give the Gift of Love”**

**Prepared by the Program Office of Deaconess, Home Missioner and Home Missionary**

[NOTE: The following document focuses on deaconesses, home missioners and home missionaries. However, we also gratefully recognize and celebrate the ministry of the missionaries who served under the Women’s Division.]

- A retired deaconess is diagnosed with cancer and faces treatments, travel and high medical expenses.
- A missionary has a health crisis and requires care in a safe, nurturing environment.
- A home missionary has served more than 40 years plus additional years as a volunteer and now has no home of her own because she always lived in mission housing.
- A deaconess becomes disabled but social security does not cover the cost of her care.

What do all of these persons have in common? They have all answered the call from God to serve where needed. Each has also received help through the Women’s Division pension plan and other care provided through the generosity of the Call to Prayer and Self-Denial Offering.

Once every four years, the Call to Prayer and Self-Denial program and offering focuses on providing support for those who were sent out by the Women’s Division in the early years of mission and deaconess work. This Retirement Benefits Fund provides pensions, health care, and support for Brooks-Howell Home where many of the missionaries and deaconesses live after retirement.

Many Women’s Division retirees reside at Brooks-Howell Home. Though called a Home, Brooks-Howell is actually a retirement community which provides safe housing for independent retirees as well as nursing and skilled nursing care as those become necessary. It is obvious that this is a unique place as soon as you enter the grounds. From the peace flag and peace pole which greet you in the drive way to the international collections of treasured archives, one can see the global impact of missionaries and deaconesses, and through them, of United Methodist Women. After all, it was the women of the church who trained, encouraged, and sent forth these servants of God. Without Mission Giving and the Call to Prayer and Self-Denial offering, Brooks-Howell would not be the loving and caring Christian community many of us call ‘home’.

Not all retirees chose to live at Brooks-Howell. Other Women’s Division missionaries and deaconesses continue to reside in their own homes or in health care facilities closer to their families.

Today, the deaconess movement is entering a new era of serving once again under the Women’s Division. For some, this is a homecoming. For all deaconesses, it is a time of excitement and expectation of great things yet to come. Just as exciting is the creation of the Office of Home Missioner, a relationship for men who feel God’s calling for a lifetime of Christian service as a lay person. While the Office of Deaconess has been a part of our tradition as a church since 1888, the Office of Home Missioner was established at the 2004 General Conference providing lay men with an opportunity to serve in a lifetime relationship in The United Methodist Church. This has been the first opportunity for lay men to be in an official life-time relationship in ministry since the closing of the option of diaconal minister by the 1996 General Conference.<sup>1</sup>

The early deaconess movement in the United Methodist tradition was built on a strong heritage of activism and social renewal in denominational work and in partnership with secular organizations. A strong motivation in this movement was the desire to meet the physical and spiritual needs of people marginalized by society: individuals/families in isolated places such as coal-mining areas; immigrants and migrants in inner cities; persons facing discrimination, especially those most neglected, such as women and children. From the beginning of the deaconess movement, deaconesses worked in the margins of society; today they still engage in cutting-edge ministries. God’s presence is still found on the edges of society where deaconesses and home missioners continue to join the struggle to promote healing and overcome injustice.<sup>2</sup>

*[PROGRAM SUGGESTION: Deaconesses, Home Missioners and Home Missionaries may share their personal ministries at this point. Give examples of ways to engage local units with both active and retired deaconesses, home missioners and home missionaries as included in the United Methodist Women Program Book.]*

## A PERSONAL TOUCH

[PROGRAM SUGGESTION: Pictures and expanded versions of the following statements are available, along with additional stories, at <http://brooks-howell.org/resources>.]

**Sybil Dodson**, Deaconess, 33 years of service. During an evening in the hospital Sybil shared her gratitude to United Methodist Women for the support and care provided to her in her struggle with cancer and the concern that she had for all the health care expense that was provided for by the support of United Methodist Women through the Call to Prayer and Self-Denial.

**Debbie Pittman**, Deaconess, commissioned in 1979. Debbie is grateful for the safe, loving care at Brooks-Howell Home where she now lives due to disability. She appreciates the support of United Methodist Women throughout her years of mission work and the opportunity to continue to serve as able.

**Marcella Mathys**, Missionary. For 42 years, Marcella served the Women's Division as a missionary in Mexico. She is beloved by her students, colleagues, family and friends. Unable to care for herself, Marcella now resides in the Health Unit of Brooks-Howell Home. It is such a relief to all who love her to know of the high quality care that Marcella receives on a daily basis. We are grateful to United Methodist Women for the support provided for those who so faithfully gave their lives in mission.

## RESOURCES AND LINKS

A brochure about the Office of Deaconess and the Office of Home Missioner as well as other resources to help those discerning God's call in their life are available from the address at the end of this page.

A number of documents and resources are available at <http://brooks-howell.org/resources>, including pictures and brief notes for some Women's Division deaconesses and missionaries, a history of Brooks-Howell Home, and documents which can be printed for handouts.

BROOKS-HOWELL HOME resource packet: contact Jeannette Byrd at [jbyrd@brooks-howell.org](mailto:jbyrd@brooks-howell.org) or write to her at 266 Merrimon Ave, Asheville NC 28801

THE MINISTRY OF ALL CHRISTIANS – The United Methodist Church – chart showing the relationship between lay and ordained paths of ministry. Available at <http://brooks-howell.org/resources> or from the address below.

<http://new.gbmg-umc.org/umw/programs/deaconesses/> General information about the Offices of Deaconess and Home Missioner as well as the qualifications and application process.

<http://gbmg-umc.org/umw/history/legacy.cfm#THE%20DEACONESS%20OFFICE> Living the Legacy. A history of United Methodist Women and its predecessor organizations and the relationship with women's mission work.

[http://www.missionresourcecenter.org/estore/resources/ACallToPrayer2011\\_IntroLetter.pdf](http://www.missionresourcecenter.org/estore/resources/ACallToPrayer2011_IntroLetter.pdf) Letter from Marva Usher-Kerr about official resources available for Call to Prayer 2011.

[http://www.missionresourcecenter.org/estore/resources/ACallToPrayer2011\\_OrderForm.pdf](http://www.missionresourcecenter.org/estore/resources/ACallToPrayer2011_OrderForm.pdf) Order form for 2011 Call to Prayer and Self-Denial materials.

<http://www.missionresourcecenter.org/estore/ProductDetails.aspx> Ordering information for the official United Methodist Women Program Book.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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<sup>1</sup>From brochure A Calling to Serve - Office of Deaconess and Home Missioner

<sup>2</sup>From Theology of Mission and Relationship with the Church Office of Deaconess and Home Missioner dated 9/08