



## **PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN AT FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

Written by Cathy Runburg (PW Moderator) & presented at the Spring Gathering in 2001

In the last couple of weeks I have combed through many old papers my mother had saved, old minutes books of the Session, previous PW yearbooks and have discovered some interesting facts. It didn't really surprise me because I had heard a lot of stories growing up. But it is amazing what the women of the early church were able to accomplish. Also interesting to see what things they did in the 1920's we were still doing the 80's and 90's.

How long ago do you suppose the first women's circle was formed? 1904 - I'd like to read you part of a paper found in my grandmother's things.

### **The Very Beginning of Women's Group**

In February 1904, a small group of women met to organize a church circle which consisted of women of different denominations. They were called the Plymouth Circle and met at various homes. The Plymouth Congregational Church was built in 1905. The circle had grown so rapidly that the group decided to meet at the church

From that time on the group started sponsoring activities to help finance the church. The first was a supper held in the back of Mrs. Willey's Variety Store. There were tables and wooden horses carried down from the old Oddfellows Hall. The water was carried from the John Deere School, most of the food prepared at home, and the dishes were rented. The supper was served at 25 cents.

It was quite difficult at first to hold suppers in the church as there was no kitchen. The meal was prepared in the corner of the dining room (basement). One stove, a couple of tables to work on and very few cooking utensils and dishes were rented. 150 to 200 people were served at 35 cents to 50 cents. In later years a small kitchen was built. We had a sink, stove & shelves for cooking utensils. About 6 people could be in the kitchen at one time, but we managed.

In 1921 Plymouth Congregation Church became First Presbyterian Church of East Moline and the women's circle became the Presbyterian Circle. They continued to hold events to raise money for the church.

The first annual report that mentioned the women's group that I found was 1923. The Ladies Circle had 67 members and there also was a Nevin Club but it had no report. The church had a membership of 167 so I think a majority of the women were in a circle. They spent \$1020 which included \$500 for manse improvement.

In 1926 they served the men's suppers, the Father-Son Banquet, has a Washington Tea (don't know what that is), a bake sale and a bazaar. I found a interesting note in the 1928 annual report: "Men's club not held often as ladies could not be induced to serve dinners as before." Apparently, it was as hard for Presbyterians to meet without eating then as it is now! There were 64 women in the 3 circles that year.

At the 1930 meeting, it was noted, "Rousing note of thanks (to the ladies) for great assistance to pastor's salary, redecorating of the church, and installing new furnaces - all on \$1100.

This morning I ran across the minutes from a 1950 Congregational meeting to vote on whether to move to this location. The women were looking forward even then and were more vocal about it than the men!

The first mention of the Presbyterian Women's Organization was found in 1954. There were still the original 3 circles, Presbyterian Circle, Missionary Society and the Nevin club besides PWO and all 4 had separate budgets. Two of the original PWO board are still with us, Irene Schlundt & Edna Green.

In 1957 Rev. Patterson requested that the Session elect a Committee of Women to study over all women's organizations of the church. On July 7, 1957 a congregational meeting of the women was held to vote on reorganization. It was recommended that the Nevin, Missionary and Presbyterian Circles be dissolved and be reorganized to the prescribed form of the PWO Presbyterian Women's Organization. The vote was 48 for, 4 against.

Goldie Wright and Betty Harker were in charge of serving the Kiwanis dinners back in the early 50's. We realized about \$1000 a year from those dinners. And in 1958 we relented and began serving dinners for the Men's Club. Also in 1958 there was an intensive person to person contact regarding circles and we ended up with 72% of the total enrollment of women in the church involved in circles! That was the first year we held our Christmas potluck and I hope that is a tradition we will keep!

January of 1959 we had to reorganize again because of the merger of the United Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church of the USA. Our new name was United Presbyterian Women. That year the Spring Presbyterial was held at South Park in Rock Island and 700 women attended, 18 from our church.

In 1960 we discontinued serving Kiwanis Dinners but I found a note that said we later agreed to serve it longer so they must have offered us a pretty good deal. One year there was a note from the Kiwanis thanking the ladies for their special effort in serving the venison dinner. We also began our participation in the Fellowship of the Least Coin that was started by the aunt of our own Avis Dwyer. I couldn't find specific dates when this started or ended but in the 60's \$1000 a year was budgeted to go to the churches general operating fund.

1964 was a year of major outreach efforts. Esther circle was formed for the young women of the church. There were 8 of us that first year. I still have the ceramic bean pot they gave me as a wedding gift in 1965. Study books were purchased for the 97 women of the church who did not attend circles. I was pretty impressed by that! We also began doing nursing home visits that fall as part of a Christian Friendliness program. Sometime in the early 60's we began serving Lenten dinners.

I couldn't find any minutes from the 70's and during that time, the type of reports we now include in the Session minute book were not done. So some of you are going to have to give us some memories of those times.

In 1984 we were a busy group. I'd like to read a couple of paragraphs from the annual report that year Do you remember what that \$4000 was spent on? (Drapery for the CE wing.)

There were 6 circles in 1986 with an average of 60 women in circles each month. We were making many changes once again as the northern and southern churches merged. In July of 1988, UPW became PW (Presbyterian Women).

In the nineties we had a Father-Daughter Banquet as well as a Mother-Daughter Tea. This was the decade we saw a decline in our membership.

We were losing a lot of our older ladies who had been in circles for 60 years. And we have had problems attracting younger members. In many cases, they are just too busy. As I said in our business meeting, we have had great difficulties getting officers; we haven't had a full board for several years.

In spite of all this, I don't want us to be thinking of this time as "giving up". We are changing our emphasis! We will focus on fellowship and Bible study. We will still be of service to the church whether through circle activities or individually. I hope that if one group has a good fellowship or activity idea, they will contact the other circle or Sandy and we will do things on a more spontaneous level rather than planning events a year ahead. I hope we will always be looking forward and keep an open mind about our future. We don't know what opportunities God will put in front of us. Maybe being less structured will open new possibilities. No matter what, we will always be Presbyterian Women!

I have brought as many old yearbooks as I could find and some old minutes and annual reports if you would like to look through them. But before we do that I would like to hear how some of you became involved in PW, if there was a specific person that got you involved. And special memories you have of past activities or events. The floor is open to you.