Some people in the Missionary Church may be aware that women have occasionally been licensed for ministry, especially women who have served overseas as missionaries. But few people realize how extensive this practice formerly was within North America, nor how drastically patterns of women in ministry have changed over the years. In some respects, the experience of the Missionary Church parallels the situations described by Janette Hassey in her groundbreaking study, *No Time for Silence: Evangelical Women in Public Ministry Around the Turn of the Century* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1986). Women lost their roles in numerous evangelical denominations and institutions as 19th century evangelicals became 20th century fundamentalists and attitudes towards women became much more conservative and restrictive. This in turn was part of an even larger shift from progressive to reactionary social attitudes and behaviors among evangelicals which has been identified by sociologist David O. Moberg as *The Great Reversal* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1977).

The women named on this list are those who served in a position of ministry within the United States or Canada, exclud-
ing Hawaii, which was for many years considered a mission field. The dates cover the time period from each one’s earliest mention in her respective conference journal to her latest mention in the same. The information compiled in this list came primarily from the conference journals of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ (MBC)/United Missionary Church (UMC) and from The Missionary Church Association (MCA) annual conference reports available in the Missionary Church Archives. Additional information came from *The Historical Background of the Missionary Church and a History of the Ohio District* by Harold E. Steele (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Missionary Church for the Ohio District, 1981), and *History of the United Missionary Church Canadian Northwest District: 1894 to 1962* by Mr. and Mrs. Noah Swam (Calgary: Canadian Northwest District, 1965). Many of the women on this list were also foreign missionaries at one time or another. However, since these lists are not inclusive of all the women licensed for ministry overseas, which would be a much more ambitious project, the dates on this list include only the years that they worked in the U.S. or Canada. *What God Hath Wrought* by Everek Storms (Springfield, OH: United Missionary Society, 1948) was helpful in determining the dates for such women.

Almost all of the women on this list had some type of license for ministry within the U.S. or Canada. They are referred to in their conference rolls by many different terms, including “ministering sisters,” “sister workers,” and “helpers”; in the MCA they are sometimes referred to as “women workers.” As a step beyond licensing, many women were also “approved” or “dedicated.” Those referred to as ministering sisters usually had completed this process, and are noted on this list as “approved.” This approval or dedication appears to be a special form of ordination for female ministers. There are at least two reasons for thinking this was the case. One was that the date of approval or dedication was normally listed in the same column as ordination for men in annual reports. The second was that both oral histories and historical records indicate that women who had been approved for or dedicated to ministry understood themselves to be ordained, and some were known to use the title “Reverend” (for example, Rev. Mae Shupe). It was customary for such women to carry out all the duties and functions of ministry except performing marriages. Why this one restriction was maintained (informally) by the Missionary Church is something of a mystery at this time. It was not a matter of the law since female ministers were duly recognized by civil authorities.

The single women who served in ministry tended to work primarily in smaller churches, church plants, or city missions.
Those who were wives of pastors were often assistants to or co-pastors with their husbands. A few married women were licensed for ministry but not married to ministers. Other women who didn’t serve directly in pastoral roles worked in rest homes or orphanages, and many were music ministers. Some were conference evangelists, such as Annie Yeo. Many of the women regularly preached, and many other women preached occasionally who were never formally licensed. Geographically, the women tended to be spread very evenly. Small districts had few women in ministry, large districts had many. Women in ministry were quite prominent until around 1940, when their numbers began to decrease rapidly. Those who had served for long periods of time were retired or became inactive, though they were still considered approved workers. In the old Pennsylvania Conference (pre-1952), almost all the names of female ministers were removed from the conference rolls by 1903. By the time of the merger of the UMC and the MCA in 1969, less than ten names of women remained on the lists of ministers denomination-wide.

In addition to the omission of missionaries, there were at least two other important categories of women in ministry which are not fully reflected in the lists which follow below. One is the society of specially ordained “deaconesses” which was developed by Matron Marianna Gerber under the direction of J. A. and Katharina Sprunger in Berne, Indiana, shortly before the formation of the MCA. “The Sisters,” as they were called, served without pay and functioned as a Protestant religious order in Chicago and elsewhere. A similar phenomenon occurred in Pennsylvania and Ohio within the MBC, where a female religious order called “The Gospel Worker Society” attracted dozens of uniformed members who ministered on the streets and in Gospel centers. (Attempts to create a parallel order for men, “The Gospel Herald Society,” proved much less successful, but uniformed men did serve in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, also doing evangelistic outreach and planting at least one church.)

What follows is a limited memorial to the hundreds of women who have served in ministry in the Missionary Church. While there is no claim the list is either perfect or exhaustive, every attempt has been made to make it as reliable and complete as possible. Perhaps some readers will be able to make additions or corrections, or will even be moved to research the lives and ministries of individual women listed below whose stories have yet to be adequately told.

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