

## Declaration of the Dignity of Women

We, the Board of Trustees and Advisory Board of Woman's Missionary Union of Virginia, are women in leadership. Our heritage as such extends deep into history, echoing through centuries of faithful lives.

*"We have long been convinced that our churches have failed to employ usefully their female members. They occupied a sphere of activity and usefulness in the apostolic churches, it seems to us, which has not been assigned to them in modern churches."*

Editors, J.B. Jeter & A. E. Dickinson- **Religious Herald, April 13, 1871**

*"Lottie Moon was in the forefront of the struggle for women's leadership roles in the church. She amazed and sometimes offended male missionaries by refusing to accept a silent role in missions meetings. Instead, she insisted upon taking a full share in the discussion and decisions regarding mission policy."*

**SBC Annual, 1891**

*"We declare ourselves in sympathy with all the forces of righteousness: international and interracial justice; world peace...; universal education; Sabbath observance; sacredness of the home; the family altar; high standards for womanly speech, dress, and conduct; improved industrial conditions; child welfare; and public health."*

**WMU Plan of Work, 1914-1960**

*"Through the centuries, women have witnessed and served and waited on God to enlighten Christian men concerning women's place and capacity in Christian institutions."*

**Address to WMU Training School, May 8, 1941**

*"Many women students have related to me... their most painful paradox. It is hard to handle the difference between the encouragement one receives up to the point of seminary graduation and the mixed response she then receives in her attempts to secure employment."*

**Anne Davis, "Women at Seminaries" in Contempo, January 1976**

*"The New Testament says you are free. The walls are down; the veil of the temple is open, so make your own contribution... Women became the core of the first churches. They became deacons, they prayed, they prophesied, they led in worship."*

**Ministers Wives Luncheon, Portland, 1973**

*"We've got to do a turnaround. Women are less respected today than they were when I first came into the denomination as an employed person... We've gone so far to the right that we're not the people that I grew up under, not at all, and I regret that."*

**Alma Hunt, Virginia Missions, Summer 2002**

We connect with our prophetic past, remembering the voices of our foremothers: Jochebed and Hannah, Ruth and Naomi, Deborah, Mary and Elizabeth, Mary of Bethany, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the Mother of James, women dragged to prison by Saul, Tabitha (translated Dorcas,) Mary the mother of John, Lydia, Chloe, Nympha, Priscilla, Apphia, the four daughters of Phillip, Ammias of Philadelphia, and all of the other named and unnamed women who led in the first churches.

As we remember these and others, we draw the strength to lead in our own day, at a time when the leadership of women has been devalued and suppressed. We draw the strength to declare, with prophetic conviction:

- **That we reject** all blanket discrimination against women in the work of Christian ministry, in particular, as elaborated in the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message;
- **That we reject** the findings and policy of the North American Mission Board with regard to the non-endorsement of women to chaplaincy positions.
- **That we reject** any devaluation of women worldwide.

In rejecting these humiliating affronts to the dignity of Christian women, we affirm the autonomy of the local church, God's call to every believer to carry the good news of Jesus Christ to the world, and the core values of Woman's Missionary Union of Virginia. These values include the priesthood of the believer, the call to mission, the giftedness of believers, response to social and moral crises, the development of leaders, partnership with Christians around the world, and the creation of diverse organizational models.

Our declaration is that women **are** leaders in the church, called by God, commissioned by Christ, led by the Holy Spirit, with a strong, noble heritage. Empowered by our mission, values, and heritage, we pledge to support all people, especially women and girls, as they live out their diverse and unlimited vocations. Through the study and exposition of scripture, public advocacy, mentorship, networking, inclusive language, careful dialogue, proactive speech, seminary scholarships, and influence on pastoral search committees and nominating boards, we will encourage and continue to develop the leadership of women and girls in all spheres and at all levels of church life.

To this end, we the Boards of Woman's Missionary Union of Virginia declare ourselves in sympathy with all the forces of righteousness and recommit our lives to the mission of challenging the whole Church family to live out the biblical concept of radical Christianity, leading individuals to be dynamic, relevant, caring witnesses, connecting to a needy world.

In this Kingdom work, we are not activists, but leaders and prophets, calling the Church toward its true, original, and best identity. As women, our call to leadership is the Great Commission of Jesus Christ; our guide is the Holy Spirit of God; our heritage is scriptural, ancient, and living; our crisis is urgent and our declaration is firm: "your sons and daughters will prophesy." (Joel 2:28) (Acts 2:17)

### The World for Christ, Hallelujah

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