

FOREWORD

“It is for us to remember that those to whom we look in the past were in fact looking ahead.”¹

C*onduct Becoming to a Woman* was written over 30 years ago. That seems like another time and another place altogether for women at the dawn of the 21st century. I was only eleven years old then and just beginning to understand the differences between girls and boys in my generation. Notwithstanding, I have benefited greatly from the accomplishments of the generations of women who have gone before me. And despite an oppressive, conservative upbringing complete with traumatic and abusive experiences (not unlike many girls of every generation), I developed a strong understanding of the traditional *and* non-traditional roles of women. To some extent, I fell right in line with many of my foremothers who battled social and religious stereotypes of “what a woman or lady should be” by somehow finding a balance in the middle—one minute tackling a neighborhood boy in a game of football and the next minute imagining myself as his doting inferior, or at least his helpmeet and the mother of his children.

And even though so much ground has been gained in the generations since *Conduct* was first released, I hear the same messages and ideologies of past centuries coming from the mouths of today’s generations of younger women, and I witness their struggles to find their own voices and their own “conduct” amid a still-sexist, oppressive and male-dominated church and society. Yes, “We’ve come a long way,” but we still have so very far to go before all people—created equal and equally blessed by God—

experience that same equality in church, synagogue, mosque and country.

The Women's Division has chosen to print a revised and expanded edition of *Conduct Becoming to a Woman* for two reasons. Firstly, Elaine Magalis' original text is an incredible account of the contributions of women in the predecessor denominations of The United Methodist Church, and its historical significance should not be lost from our libraries—and more importantly—our narrative tradition as an organization of women in mission for over 130 years. Secondly, our contributions as women organized for mission have continued to this day and will continue into the future by the efforts of younger members. It is primarily for their sakes—those young women just starting out in the organization—that this revised and expanded edition of *Conduct* is being printed. The original text from the 1973 edition is retained in its entirety. Sidebars have been added to each chapter that feature photographs and brief biographies of many of the women mentioned in the text. In addition, there is a program guide for each chapter, a new chapter entitled “Afterword: Thirty Years Later” that brings the struggles and accomplishments of women in church and society into the 21st century, an expanded timeline of women's involvement in history from the 1800s to the present, and an updated bibliography and resource list.

Since 1996, the Women's Division has made a concerted effort to enlist younger women as members and leaders in the organization. I have had the privilege of pioneering this work since its inception and have seen thousands of young women ages 12 to 25 come alongside their older sisters in the organization to work on behalf of women, children and youth around the world. Many of these young women are pioneers in their own right: organizing units among their peers, planning and conducting gatherings, and providing leadership at every level of the organization. Many have already “graduated” from the ranks and moved into full-time missionary work or are pursuing careers in medicine, technology, engineering, and ministry, as well as choosing marriage, motherhood, and other vocations.

The key difference for these young women is that they have choices. They are not confined to the traditional roles prescribed to our foremothers in the 19th and 20th centuries. Something very significant has happened, even in the past 30 years since *Conduct* was published, to

drastically change the climate in this country for women—conduct once thought to be unbecoming to a woman is, in fact, very becoming. Girls and young women are taught that they can achieve everything and anything their male counterparts endeavor. Their place is everywhere and anywhere God calls them in church and society. And in all of these places, they can expect and demand the same rights and privileges as boys and men.

However “becoming” this 21st century reality is for girls and women in the United States (and still not entirely realized by all), our sisters in other countries and within other religious and cultural environments do not have the same rights and privileges. Therefore, our work as women organized for mission continues in much the same vein as it did when Isabella Thoburn and Clara Swain first set sail for India and when Elaine Magalis penned the original text of *Conduct*. Women must be afforded the right to govern their own lives and receive the same benefits as men, without exception. This, and nothing less, is conduct becoming to a woman.

This revised and expanded edition of *Conduct Becoming to a Woman* is fondly dedicated to all the young women who have worked with the Women’s Division since 1996 to pave the way for future generations of young women organized for mission. They are the heralds of our past and the lanterns into our future.

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