



## *Celebration of the Call Resources*

The 2021 Session of the Mississippi Annual Conference adopted a resolution, that the first Sunday of each June, beginning in 2022, be designated as “Celebration of the Call” Sunday in memory of Rev. Ruth Wood, and in honor of our sisters in ministry, and that these days be given to prayer, celebration, and a renewed commitment to the affirmation of female pastoral leadership and the encouragement of the call to clergy service within the lives of your youth and young adults.

Please be intentional to include a time for Celebration of the Call this Pentecost Sunday and throughout the month of June. Below are some worship resources, ideas, and biographies of clergywomen trailblazers whose stories you may wish to highlight in worship. Perhaps you can involve or lift up the stories of clergywomen who have faithfully served your ministry, congregation, district, or our conference. Encourage everyone to wear red (shoes, ties, and other clothing) as a sign of the Spirit and celebration of women in ministry. Consider the men and women from your congregation or ministry who have responded to God’s call in various ways. Take this opportunity to provide ways to cultivate God’s calling to ministry in youth, young adults, and people of all ages.

### **CALL TO WORSHIP**

God has poured out love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

**Come, Holy Spirit, Lord and giver of life.**

Fill the hearts of your faithful people and kindle in them the fire of your love.

**Come, Holy Spirit, Lord and giver of life.**

Sweep into our lives this day,

that all may experience your refreshment, your renewal, and your calling.

**Come, Holy Spirit, Lord and giver of life.**

### **POEM**

(Written by Lo Alaman, <https://seedbed.com/pentecost-poem/>, could be shared on social media or incorporated into a newsletter, bulletin, reading, or sermon)

He said be

And everything became so

And in the amount of time it took for breath to pass through lips

A universe boomed, and stars sparked, and worlds began to exist  
And all became His

He said breathe

And we became lungs

And we became bodies filled to life

Animated by spirit and instruction

And suddenly this dust had a Father

So we became daughters and sons

And love became both our names and our heritage

He said taste and see

He said faith and believe

He said inhale love's promises

And exhale whatever lies lead our hearts to lonely

We went astray

Smoke filled our lungs

Sin cut off our airways

Like a knee to the neck

We cried, I can't breathe

There was no justice, there was no peace

Could He speak again?

Could His Spirit whistle through the caverns of our chests?

Could He send a savior to resuscitate?

They whip His skin

He gasps in pain

He breathes His last

He lay in grave

The Spirit comes

He rises to reign!  
 He breathes on the church  
 We rise the same

He says breathe  
 And we come alive  
 He says receive  
 And let Spirit guide  
 The world needs life  
 The breath of Christ  
 Is in our lungs  
 Say Spirit come!  
 Say Spirit come!  
 Spirit come!

We pray . . . Holy Spirit come!

#### **OPENING PRAYER**

(written by Rev. Karla Miller, Minister of Community Life at Old North Church in Marblehead, MA.  
 Posted on RevGalBlogPals. <https://revgalblogpals.org/2018/05/19/saturday-prayer-speaking-in-tongues>)

**O for a thousand tongues to sing sweet praise!**

O rushing wild spirit of God  
 pour out the fire of love upon us!

Unfurl your language upon our lips,  
 Unlock our minds to embrace all possibility  
 Unleash our hearts so Your justice flows freely.

**O for a thousand tongues to sing sweet praise!**

O rushing wild spirit of God  
pour out the fire of love upon us!

May your breeze bring health and wholeness,  
May your breath heat our resolve,  
May your Spirit storm the earth with mercy and grace

**O for a thousand tongues to sing sweet praise!**

O rushing wild spirit of God  
pour out the fire of love upon us!

Set us free from self-doubt,  
Make us listeners as we seek awareness,  
Shake us awake when we forget our privilege.

**O for a thousand tongues to sing sweet praise!**

O rushing wild spirit of God  
pour out the fire of love upon us

Amen. Amen. Amen.

### **LITANY OF CONFESSION**

(based on Habakkuk 2: 1-4. Written in 1998 by Katherine Hawker for the Evangelical United Church of Christ. Posted on Liturgy Outside. <http://liturgyoutside.net/CPr26.html>)

For ignoring the vision

breathed by the living Spirit

churning deep within our souls;

**Lord have mercy,**

**Lord have mercy,**

**Have mercy upon us.**

For refusing to look at the vision  
 alive within those  
 who look or act or sound different from us;

**Christ have mercy,**

**Christ have mercy,**

**Have mercy upon us.**

For choosing familiarity, ease, and comfort  
 rather than risking the opportunities  
 afforded in the vision

**Lord have mercy,**

**Lord have mercy,**

**Have mercy upon us.**

Great Thanksgiving (Adapted from Great Thanksgiving for Day of Pentecost and All Saints, *UM Book of Worship*)

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them up to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

It is right, and a good and joyful thing,  
 always and everywhere to give thanks to you,

Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth.

In the beginning your Spirit moved over the face of the waters.

You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life.

When we turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast.

God of Abraham and Sarah,

God of Miriam and Moses,

God of Joshua and Deborah,  
 God of Ruth and David,  
 God of the priests and the prophets,  
 God of Mary and Joseph,  
 God of the apostles and the martyrs,  
 God of our mothers and our fathers,  
 God of our children to all generations.

Your Spirit came upon prophets and teachers,  
 anointing them to speak your Word.

Today we give thanks for women like Ruth Wood, M. M. Merchant, Dale Owen, and Emma McNair  
 who responded to your call to ordained ministry,  
 (you may add names of women who have served your congregation)  
 as we pray also to be filled with fire, power, strength, and joy as your church.  
 And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven  
 we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,  
 heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.  
 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ.  
 At his baptism in the Jordan your Spirit descended upon him  
 and declared him your beloved Son.  
 With your Spirit upon him he turned away the temptations of sin.  
 Your Spirit anointed him to preach good news to the poor,  
 to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind,  
 to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
 and to announce that the time had come  
 when you would save your people.  
 He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with sinners.  
 By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection,  
 you gave birth to your Church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death,  
 and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.  
 When the Lord Jesus ascended, he promised to be with us always,  
 baptizing us with the Holy Spirit and with fire, as on the Day of Pentecost.

On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread,  
 gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said:  
 "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.  
 Do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over he took the cup,  
gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:  
"Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant,  
poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.  
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

On the day you raised him from the dead  
he was recognized by his disciples in the breaking of the bread,  
and in the power of your Holy Spirit your Church has continued  
in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup.

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,  
we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving  
as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us,  
as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

**Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.**

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here,  
and on these gifts of bread and wine.  
Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ,  
that we may be for the world the body of Christ,  
redeemed by his blood and empowered by the gifts of the Spirit.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ,  
one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world,  
showing forth the fruit of the Spirit until Christ comes in final victory,  
and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church,  
all honor and glory is yours, almighty God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

***Resolution for the Celebration of Female Clergy and  
the Remembrance of the life of Rev. Ruth Wood***

(Adopted at the 2021 Session of the MS Annual Conference with a vote of 551 Yes and 18 No)

WHEREAS women in the early 20th century responded to God's call through the various expressions of Mississippi Methodism, including M.M. Merchant who was licensed to preach in 1900 in the MS Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church and ordained an elder in 1903, and

WHEREAS, four women in the Central Jurisdiction Mississippi Conference (i.e., African American congregations prior to the 1968 Merger) were approved supply pastors (i.e., non-clergy) and assigned to charges at various points between 1929 and 1965. One, Mabel Cochran, served small charges on the Gulf Coast from 1949-1965. Another woman, Margaret Bess, was accepted on trial by that conference in 1958 and served at the Mississippi Rural Center in Marion County until 1965, when her probationary membership was discontinued, and

WHEREAS Virginia Ruth Mayhew Wood was born on August 10, 1925, to Henry Ivan and Ora Allee Graham Mayhew in the recently established Etta, Mississippi, previously known as the Rocky Ford Community of Union County, and

WHEREAS this remarkable woman, following her completion of an English degree from Blue Mountain College, chose to respond to the Call of Christ on her life and pursue ministry outside of the classroom, and

WHEREAS in 1959, she courageously responded to this call to ministry and became the first woman licensed to preach in the North Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Church, and

WHEREAS she was ordained deacon in 1961 and elder in 1964 and became the first woman received into full connection in the Methodist Church in Mississippi in 1967, and

WHEREAS, she served fruitfully and faithfully the congregations of Pleasant Grove, Liberty, Crossroads, Jumpertown, Blackland, Oak Grove, Carolina, and Grace United Methodist Churches in Booneville; Dennis, Golden, and Old Bethel United Methodist Churches in southern Tishomingo County; Box Chapel, Hopewell, and Indian Springs United Methodist Churches in Alcorn County; Walls, Lake Cormorant, and Robinsonville in DeSoto and Tunica counties, and

WHEREAS she retired after 29 years in the ministry from Byhalia United Methodist Church in 1988, and

WHEREAS her example of bravery, determination, commitment, and grace have served as an example for generations of United Methodist clergy, in particular women in ministry,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that all of the churches of the Mississippi Annual Conference are actively committed to the full inclusion of women in all aspects of ministry, including licensed and ordained pastoral leadership, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that by action of the 2021 Session of the Mississippi Annual Conference, that the First Sunday of each June, beginning in 2022, be designated as "Celebration of the Call" Sunday in Memory of Rev. Ruth Wood, and in honor of our sisters in ministry, and



BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that these days be given to prayer, celebration, and a renewed commitment to the affirmation of female pastoral leadership and the encouragement of the call to clergy service within the lives of your youth and young adults.

Respectfully Submitted by the Extended Cabinet of the Mississippi Annual Conference and The Mississippi Conference Commission on the Status and Role of Women

## **ARTICLES ABOUT CLERGYWOMEN AND METHODISM**

<https://gcsrw.wordpress.com/2022/03/30/clergywomen-promote-hope-and-healing/>

<https://www.wnccumc.org/the-power-of-red-celebrating-60-years-of-full-clergy-rights-for-women-in-the-umc>

<https://www.resourceumc.org/en/partners/gcsrw/home/about-us-and-news/our-history/women-in-umc-history>

The United Methodist Church represents different threads of traditions, conferences, and denominations that have merged and split over the course of our history. As we celebrate the trailblazers in the Methodist movement, we acknowledge these different groups which now form the UMC. Women have been key leaders within the church throughout its history, but they have had to advocate for full clergy rights. In 1880, Anna Oliver and Anna Howard Shaw sought credentialing as women preachers and were denied by the Methodist Episcopal Church. Shaw departed the denomination for ordination in the Methodist Protestant Church, but Oliver remained Methodist to continue advocating for women's right to preach. In 1924, women finally earned licensure to the pulpit but were denied full membership to conferences. When the northern and southern branches of the Methodist Episcopal Church reunited and consolidated with the Methodist Protestant Church in 1939, women lost their preaching privileges once again in The Methodist Church. The status of women in the pulpit maintained challenges until 1956 when women finally received rights to full membership as clergy in annual conferences. Prior to women's inclusion in preaching, the Women's Division remained the sole place where women could express vocational callings and serve neglected communities.

Dr. Joe Reiff has shared some of his research on clergywomen in Mississippi from a paper he presented in 2017 as well as a presentation for the 2021 Summer Lecture Series at Church Street in Knoxville, TN. Below are a few highlights of his research which may be helpful as sermon illustrations or newsletter articles highlighting clergywomen in MS Methodism.

References: "Mississippi Methodism in Transition: The Advent of Women Clergy, 1959-1995" Joseph T. Reiff, Paper for Southern Historical Association 2017 "Methodists in the South" Session 58, Sunday, November 12

Summer Lecture by Dr. Joe Reiff available online

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KAHB\\_WKLUBc&t=871s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KAHB_WKLUBc&t=871s)

**Mississippi Conference, Methodist Protestant Church**

**M. M. Merchant** (“Sister Merchant,” as she was “affectionately known”) was ordained an elder in December 1903. She had been licensed to preach for the previous three years (1900-1903), and both the Methodist Protestant General Church (MPC) and its Mississippi Conference were “by no means unanimous in favor of such a move, but there was a rather reluctant yielding opinion that permitted it.”<sup>1</sup> Between 1903 and the 1939 Unification, eleven women established some kind of ministerial relationship with the Mississippi Conference MPC, and some of those were ordained. Four were appointed as sole pastor of a charge for at least one year; two others assisted men in pastoral duties for at least a few years.<sup>2</sup>

**Martha Ann (Mattie) Nall Grantham:** On trial, 1907; ordained elder, 1926, never served a pastoral appointment

**Mollie Denson:** “received into conference,” 1909

**Florence Thornton:** received 1911

**C. L. McBerry:** received 1916

**India Morgan:** received 1917

**Rosa Holder Gerald:** received 1923

**Hattie Bateman:** received 1924

**Beulah Ivy:** received 1926; E, 1930 (mainly served as co-pastor with her father, J. W. Brand)

**Julia Bass:** received 1933

**Mildred Brand:** received 1938

**Mississippi Conference, ME Church and Central Jurisdiction (African American)**

Women were approved as supply pastors (i.e., not ordained) and appointed to charges at various points between 1929 and 1965. One, **Mabel Cochran**, served small charges on the Gulf Coast from 1949-1965. Another woman, **Margaret Bess**, was accepted on trial by that conference in 1958 and

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<sup>1</sup> William Lee Hamrick, *The Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church, 1829-1939* (Jackson, MS: Hawkins Foundation, Mississippi Conference Historical Society, 1957), 178. The MPC had begun ordaining women in the late 1800s, with the first known in Indiana in 1866--Thompson, *Courageous Past, Bold Future*, 18 (Thompson would have reported M. M. Merchant’s ordination in Mississippi had she known of it, but she did not).

<sup>2</sup> This information was obtained from perusing Swep F. Harkey, “History—Records, Mississippi Annual Conference, Methodist Protestant Church, 1870-1939,” carbon typescript, J. B. Cain Archives of Mississippi Methodism, Millsaps College (hereafter JBCA); see Appendix below for list.

served at the Mississippi Rural Center in Marion County until 1965, when her probationary membership was discontinued.<sup>3</sup>

Date listed is year each one appears in Journal for first time. Before 1939, this conference was part of Methodist Episcopal (Northern) Church.

**Margaret C. Phillips, 1929**

**Mrs. E. E. Robinson, 1933**

**Mrs. M. E. Bryant, 1935**

**Mabel Cochran, 1949**

**Margaret Bess, OT 1958 (I found no mention of D)**

### **North Mississippi Conference**

**Ruth Wood-** At a Sunday night service in early 1959 at Salem Methodist Church in the Union County community of Etta, Ruth Mayhew Wood, a 34-year-old wife and mother, experienced a profound sense of calling: the eyes of the picture of Jesus on the sanctuary wall seemed to be staring directly at her, and the message she received in her mind was “The eyes of Jesus are upon you. What are you going to do about it?” After resisting that message, she spoke with her pastor about it a few days later; he did not dismiss it but also told her erroneously that women could not preach in the Methodist Church. A few months later, the word of her experience had gotten to George Williams, the district superintendent, and he and his wife had dinner with Ruth and her husband Huey the evening of the Salem-Friendship Charge’s quarterly conference. She asked Williams, “Will my church let me respond to this call?” He answered, “Your church will allow you to do anything God calls you to do.” The quarterly conference approved her for the first step toward a license to preach, with no dissenting votes. A few months later, her husband also presented himself to the Salem-Friendship quarterly conference and was approved as well.<sup>4</sup>

They were soon appointed as supply pastors to the seven-church Booneville Charge in nearby Prentiss County: Huey as the pastor and Ruth as his unpaid associate (Mississippi Methodist bishops and cabinets have often not known what to do with women pastors). Ruth Wood’s story includes

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<sup>3</sup> *Mississippi Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, Journals*: Margaret Phillips in 1929, 22; 1930, 9; and 1931, 8; Mrs. E. E. Robinson, 1933, 5; *Mississippi Conference, Central Jurisdiction, Journals*: Mrs. M. E. Bryant and Mrs. Robinson, 1939, 4; no women listed or appointed during World War II years, but Bryant appears again in 1946, 33; Mabel Cochran first appears in 1949 journal and through much of the 1950s, then listed as appointed at Waveland, Ramsey Springs in 1960, 28; Cochran retires as an approved supply pastor in 1966, 32, and died in 1967 (1968 Journal, 79); re: M. Bess, see 1958, 22 and 1965, 30; see list in Appendix below. I have thus far not found any women listed as supply pastors or in other categories in journals for the other black conference (Upper Mississippi) or either of the white conferences before Ruth Wood, whose story begins in next paragraph.

<sup>4</sup> Joe Reiff’s interview with Ruth M. Wood, Booneville, MS, May 19, 2017.

several points where she asked God for a sign. In the first few weeks of their time at Booneville, some people in the churches decided that God had called Ruth only to get to her husband, the true recipient of the calling. Bothered by this, one Sunday Ruth's duties were to preach at the Liberty Church and then at Grace Church, and she had asked God for a sign to confirm her calling. Nothing unusual happened at Liberty, but toward the end of the service at Grace, a woman seated in the front stood and began shouting praise to God. Ruth Wood decided, "That's unusual!" The next year, she was paid a salary. She finished her college degree and wanted to go to seminary, but she settled for the Methodist Church's Course of Study program, which enabled her to be ordained deacon in 1961 and elder in 1964, but also delayed her conference membership process: she was received on trial in 1965 and became the first woman in full connection (full clergy rights) in the North Mississippi Conference in 1967. She and her husband stayed on the Booneville Charge for eight years, followed by her appointment to Golden (in Tishomingo County, connected with her husband's appointment to nearby Belmont) in 1967. In 1972, she became sole pastor of Box Chapel Church in Corinth.<sup>5</sup>

The North Mississippi Conference's acceptance of Ruth Wood paved the way by the early 1970s for four other women (all ministers' wives) to at least become licensed to preach. One, **Bettymarie Grisham**, was ordained elder and received as the second female full clergy member of the conference in 1973.<sup>6</sup>

**North Mississippi: (from here to end, names in bold became FC members of conference; those not in bold either did not pursue ordination [this list does not include the many women who pursued local/lay pastorate after the 1970s], or transferred to another conference or did not persist)**

**Ruth Mayhew Wood:** D 1961; E 1964; OT 1965; FC 1967

**Johnnie Swindoll Lampkin:** D, LP, 1970; E, FC 1991 (husband ordained)

Frances G. Easley: licensed to preach not serve (1970?)

Floy Holloman: licensed to preach not serve (1970?, husband ordained)

Gladys Miriam Brantley: LP, 1971 (husband ordained?); ord deacon Nov. 71 (NMCJ 1972, 79)

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<sup>5</sup> Ruth Wood interview; author's phone interview with Ruth Wood, June 26, 2017; Wood interview; *North Mississippi Conference Journal* (hereafter *NMCJ*) 1959, 61, 69; 1960, 66, Statistical Table No. 2 (New Albany District)—the statistical record re: salary continues to show only a salary paid to the pastor for the next few years, but the 1962 Journal (Statistical Table B, Part I for New Albany District) shows that for 1961, the Woods were also now assigned to the Grace Church in Booneville, which raised their salary and effectively meant Ruth was now being paid; *NMCJ*, 1963, 71, reflects her clearer appointment status, as she is now listed as pastor of Grace-Liberty Charge, with Huey as associate pastor, and he is listed as pastor of the West Prentiss Charge, with Ruth listed as associate—these were the same churches they had been serving, but now the Conference had configured them to give her clearer status as a pastor in her own right. *NMCJ*, 1962, 69; 1964, 65; 1965, 59; 1967, 74, 82; 1972, 85.

<sup>6</sup> *NMCJ*, 1970, 65 (J. Lampkin, deacon); 1971, 76 (Miriam [Mrs. B. B.] Brantley, full time local pastor), 77 (B. Grisham, probationary member); 1973, 117 (Grisham elder/full connection); see list in Appendix below.

**Bettymarie Grisham:** PM/D 1971; FC/E 1973 (husband ordained)

**Virginia Lee Allen:** PM/D 1973; FC/E, 1977

**Terrell Elizabeth Balof:** PM/D 1975; FC/E 1978 (took Honorable Location, 1985)

Emilie Jean Moore: PM/D 1976

**Rebecca C. Youngblood:** PM/D 1977; FC/E 1980

**Mary John Dye:** PM/D 1980; FC/E 1984

Carolyn Brantley Yeager: PM/D 1980

**Marjorie Murry Buckley:** PM/D 1978; FC/E 1985

Linda Roselin Runnels: PM/D 1979

**[Brenda Fritz:** tr in as PM fm N. Indiana Conf, 1982; FC/E 1984, but tr to W. Penn, 1984]

**Anjohnette Walker-Whitcomb:** PM/D 1984; FC/E 1986 (Africa American)

**Roswietha Elliott:** PM/D 1984; FC/E 1988 (African America)

Sammolene Karen Jones Prowell: PM/D 1984 (African American)

**Victoria Leigh White:** PM/D 1985; FC/E 1988

**Susan Lee Woodard:** PM/D 1985; FC/E 1988

**Ruth Elaine Graves:** PM/D 1986; FC/E 1989 (African American)

Annie L. Agee (Davis): PM/D 1987

**Sherill Anne Crandall Jenkins:** PM/D 1987; FC/E 1990

**Denise M. Earls** PM/D 1987; FC/E 1991

**Cora A. Givhan Ford** PM 87; FC/E 1993 (Af Am)

**Charlotte Harrison Mansfield:** PM/D 1988; FC/E 1991

**Judy Ann Phillips:** PM/D 1988; FC/E 1991

### Mississippi Conference

The Mississippi Conference (then the southern half of the state) lagged behind the others. In 1969, two women—**Virginia Allen and Mary Ann McDonald Swenson**—graduated as Religion majors from Millsaps College, a United Methodist school in Jackson. Both had grown up in Jackson’s Capitol Street Methodist Church (now United Methodist Church/UMC as of the previous year), and both believed they were called to the ordained ministry and planned to attend seminary. Swenson, already married, was approved by Capitol Street Church for a license to preach in 1969 or 1970, after she and her husband moved to Tacoma, Washington, where she worked as a youth director in a UMC congregation. She earned her seminary degree at Claremont School of Theology in California and was ordained in the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference, where she served as a pastor and district superintendent until her election as a bishop in 1992.<sup>7</sup>

Virginia Allen ran into more difficulties in her journey toward ordained ministry. During her last year at Perkins School of Theology at SMU in the spring of 1972, she approached her district superintendent (whom she knew well, because he had been pastor at Capitol Street while she was at Millsaps) about seeking probationary membership in the conference, deacon’s orders, and a pastoral appointment. He told her the conference would not ordain her or appoint her as a pastor because she was a woman, and after she returned to Dallas, she received a letter with the same message. She approached the current Capitol Street pastor and the church’s Administrative Board to be approved for a license to preach. She was unable to return for the church’s charge conference meeting on May 8, but learned a few days later that the pastor, J. K. Stuart, had recommended to the charge conference that she not be approved; he explained to her, “It was my statement that I did not want to see you hurt on a Conference level and to avoid this, you have to be voted down on a local level.” Church members did not take Stuart’s recommendation and voted by secret ballot to approve her for the license to preach.<sup>8</sup>

A lay member at Capitol Street had a cousin who was a pastor in the New Albany District in the North Mississippi Conference, and that district’s superintendent, Roy McAlilly, learned of Allen’s plight and offered her an appointment as pastor of the Salem-Friendship Charge, where he had previously served as pastor (and also Ruth Wood’s home charge). Allen served there for a year and the churches received her fairly well; she was ordained deacon and accepted as a probationary member in the North Mississippi Conference in 1973. Various factors (her mother’s death, the difficulties of rural isolation for a “city girl”—her words) led her to return to Perkins for further education in the summer of 1973.

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<sup>7</sup> Bishop Mary Ann McDonald Swenson, email to author, June 30, 2017;

<sup>8</sup> Virginia Allen email to author, October 30, 2016; “Minutes of the Charge Conference,” Capitol Street UMC, May 8, 1972, and J. K. Stuart to Virginia Allen, March 24, 1972, and May 9, 1972, all in Church Records Files, Capitol Street UMC, Box 8.5, Virginia Allen folder, JBCA. Unfortunately, Rev. Allen has not saved the letter(s) she claims she received from the district superintendent, Robert Matheny, informing her that she would not be accepted by the conference; however, the two letters from Stuart to her substantiate her claim, especially the May 9 letter, which implies that he told the Charge Conference the Mississippi Conference would not accept her for membership or pastoral appointment.

Salem-Friendship had indicated their willingness to have her return as their pastor for a second year. She pursued Clinical Pastoral Education training and became a hospital chaplain; North Mississippi ordained her elder and accepted her into full connection in 1977.<sup>9</sup>

Three years after Allen was turned away from Mississippi, three women, including one African American, were accepted as probationary members and ordained deacons in 1975. Since this status was achievable while a student was still in seminary, the conference did not have to deal immediately with the question of where to appoint them as pastors. They continued their studies at Yale (**Linda Van Dyck**), Garrett Evangelical (**Marion Elaine Myles**), and Candler (**Dorothy Dale Yarborough Owen**). In the next couple of years, the first two were discontinued as probationers because they both went to other denominations (Episcopal Church and Christian Methodist Episcopal, respectively),<sup>10</sup> but Dale Owen graduated from Candler in 1977 and prepared to return to Mississippi, along with her clergy husband, LaRue Owen. A minister in the conference approached them in the spring of 1977 about coming to be on staff at his church: LaRue would be associate pastor and Dale Director of Christian Education. Because she saw that proposal as not taking her seriously as a clergywoman, they turned down that offer and approached the Hattiesburg district superintendent, Warren Pittman, to see what might be available in his district. Pittman told them honestly that the Bishop and Cabinet (all the district superintendents) did not really know what to do with a clergy couple (or a woman, by implication).<sup>11</sup>

Dale Owen was appointed in June 1977 as Director of the Wesley Foundation at the University of Southern Mississippi (and thus not as pastor of a congregation) and she had a reasonably good experience at USM. However, her marriage was also falling apart for other reasons and ended in 1978. She returned to Atlanta to pursue Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) and became a hospital chaplain and CPE supervisor. Although the one year of service in Mississippi was sufficient for her to receive elder's orders and full membership in the conference, that milestone was delayed for both of the Owens, with LaRue's acceptance first in 1979. Dale Owen believes that the conference ultimately agreed to ordain her because they would not have to deal with appointing her as a pastor.<sup>12</sup>

So Mississippi's 1980 acceptance of Dale Owen as its first woman in full connection made it the last regular annual conference in U. S. United Methodism to do so.<sup>13</sup> Her return to Atlanta in 1978 meant that the conference still had not appointed a woman as pastor of any congregation. That changed in the next two years with the appointment of Frances Cotten as a local (lay) pastor as associate on the Centerville Charge in 1979 and the appointment of the first ordained woman as pastor

<sup>9</sup> Virginia Allen email to author, November 2, 2016; *NMCJ*, 1973, 3, 77, 116-117; 1977, 62.

<sup>10</sup> *JMC*, 1975, 93-94; 1978, 97.

<sup>11</sup> Author's interviews with F. LaRue Owen, May 21, 2017, and Dale Y. Owen, May 8, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Dale Owen interview; *JMC*, 1977, 104; 1978, 108; 1979, 96-97; 1980, 95-96.

<sup>13</sup> At the 1980 General Conference in April of that year, the pre-Conference *Daily Christian Advocate* said that other than the very small missionary conferences in the U.S., Mississippi was the only annual conference that had not yet received a woman into full connection (Mississippi approved Dale Owen in June of that year). [still need to find that DCA to cite] This claim is verified by paging through Thompson's *Courageous Past, Bold Future*; the only possible qualification (aside from the missionary conference exception) is that Thompson lists the Rio Grande Annual Conference as receiving its first woman into full connection in 1980 as well, but at the time, that conference may have qualified as a special situation (need to research this more). Regardless of the Rio Grande Conference's status, the fact remains that 1980 qualifies as the year when all regular U. S. annual conferences finally each had at least one woman in full connection.

of a charge in 1980: Betty C. Reiff to Porterville. Reiff was ordained elder and received in full connection in 1981; she was followed by Cathy Wells in 1982 and A. Carol Burnett in 1983.<sup>14</sup> In 1985, Mississippi received Emma McNair into full connection, the first African American woman full member in either Mississippi annual conference. By the time Mississippi and North Mississippi merged into one conference for the whole state in 1989, North Mississippi had ordained twelve women as elders, including two African Americans, and Mississippi had ordained eight women as elders, with McNair the only African American.<sup>15</sup>

When Rebecca Youngblood, who began serving as a pastor in North Mississippi in 1979, was appointed as the first woman district superintendent by Bishop Robert Morgan in 1992, Mississippi became the ninth of fourteen annual conferences in the Southeastern Jurisdiction to place a woman in that leadership role. Since then, more changes have come: from 2004 to 2012, Mississippi United Methodists were led for the first time by a woman bishop, Hope Morgan Ward.

**Mississippi:**

**Dorothy Dale Yarborough Owen:** PM/D 1975; FC/E 1980

Marion Elaine Myles: PM/D 75 (to CME 1978) (Af Am)

Linda Ann Van Dyck: PM/D 1975 (Honorable Location 1978--became Episcopalian priest?)

Frances Cotten: LP 1975

**Betty Clark Reiff:** PM/D 1978; FC/E 1981

**Catherine Lee Wells:** PM/D 1980; FC/E 1982

**Alice Carol Burnett:** PM/D 1977; FC/E 1983

Louise Spears: PM/D 1983 tr to Iowa (Af Am)

**Emma Louise McNair:** PM/D 1981; FC/E 1985 (Af Am)

**Vicki Loflin Gary:** PM/D 1984; FC/E 1988

**Marilyn Coral Perrine:** PM/D 1985; FC/E 1988

**Mary Colleen Fisher:** PM/D 1986; FC/E 1988

**Sylvia Lynn Strickland Blackwell:** PM/D 1986; FC/E 1990

**Marjorie Walker:** PM/D 1986; FC/E 1990 (Af Am)

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<sup>14</sup> Full disclosure: I was then (and still am) married to Betty Clark Reiff; we were the first clergy couple in the Mississippi Conference to serve pastoral/local church appointments at the same time.

<sup>15</sup> See the appendix for a list of all women received by the Mississippi Conferences through 1995.



Martha Windham D'Aquila: PM/D 1986

**Alphanette Bracey Martin**: PM/D 1987; FC/E 1990 (Af Am)

**Rachel Elizabeth Benefield**: PM/D 1988; FC/E 1991

**Carol Lynette Little**: PM/D 1988; FC/E 1990

**Dorothy Dickson-Rishel**: PM/D 1985?; FC/E 1991

**Mississippi/N. Miss./Merged (89) Women Full Connection Clergy, chronological order by Full Connection year, and N. Miss (NM) or Miss. (\*did not stay)**

Ruth Mayhew Wood 1967 NM

Bettymarie Grisham 1973 NM

Virginia Allen 1977 NM (grew up in Miss., blocked from joining Miss.)

\*Terrell Elizabeth Balof 1978 NM

Dale Yarborough Owen 1980 Miss.

Rebecca Youngblood 1980 NM

Betty Clark Reiff 1981 Miss.

Catherine Lee Wells (Monroe) 1982 Miss.

Alice Carol Burnett 1983 Miss.

Mary John Dye 1984 NM

[Brenda Fritz 1984 NM (but transferred out that year)]

Marjorie Murry Buckley 1985 NM

Emma McNair 1985 Miss. (Af Am)

Anjohnette Walker Whitcomb 1986 NM (Af Am)

Roswietha Elliott 1988 NM (Af Am)

Mary Colleen Fisher 1988 Miss.

Vicki Loflin Gary 1988 Miss.

Marilyn Coral Perrine 1988 Miss.

Victoria Leigh White 1988 NM

Susan Lee Woodard 1988 NM

**Women received FC prior to merger, NM = 11; Miss. = 8 (counted Balof, did not count Fritz)**

Nellie Virginia Maki 1989 Miss./merged

Sherill Anne Crandall Jenkins 1990 NM/merged

Carol Lynette Little 1990 Miss./merged

Alphanette Bracey Martin 1990 Miss./merged (Af Am)

Sylvia Lynn Strickland (Blackwell) 1990 Miss./merged

Marjorie Walker 1990 Miss./merged (Af Am)

Rachel Benefield 1991 Miss./merged

Dorothy Dickson-Rishel 1991 Miss./merged

Denise Earls 1991 NM/merged

Charlotte Mansfield 1991 NM/merged

Judy Ann Phillips 1991 NM/merged

Patricia K. Roseberry 1991 NM/Merged

Johnnie Lampkin 1991 NM/Merged

Virginia Jones Holland 1992

\*Regina Pierce-Newton 1992

Sally Fran Clark 1993

Sally Bevill Del Castillo 1993

Cora Givhan Ford 1993 (Af Am)

\*Ellynda Price Lipsey 1993

Terri Pridmore 1993

Victoria Sizemore Tandy 1993 (Af Am)

Deborah Mingo Moses 1994 (Af Am)

Carolyn Abrams 1995 (Af Am)

Dixie Holder Cummings 1995

Mary Lou Tickell 1995

**By 1995, 44 women received in FC, including 9 African American**

(Sources for all North Mississippi and Mississippi Conference info: journals for respective conferences and for merged conference 1989 and after)