

WOMEN'S CHURCH WORK

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Pamphlet

THE

**Central Committee on Women's
Church Work.**



**REPORT OF CONFERENCE
ON THE
Service of Women for the Church.**



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SWANWICK, JUNE 15th—17th, 1925.

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REPORT OF CONFERENCE ON THE SERVICE OF WOMEN FOR THE CHURCH.

SWANWICK—JUNE 15th to 17th, 1925.

The Conference was attended by delegates from all but four of the English dioceses, from some in Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, by leading representatives of many departments of women's work, and by clergy closely in touch with that work.

It considered (*a*) the field of women's work for the Church, taken in a wide sense, and the quality of both work and workers; (*b*) the training of workers of all sorts; (*c*) the organization of the work, particularly in dioceses; and (*d*) vocation.

The chair was taken by the Bishop of Kingston, who made the opening and closing speeches on "The Relation of Women to the service and life of the Church in which they wish to play their full part," and on "The Practical Results of the Conference." The other speakers were: Miss Ruth Rouse on "The Present Situation," Dr. Hardman and Mrs. G. K. A. Bell on "Training," Miss Augusta Deane on "Organization," the Bishop of Hulme on "Vocation," and Miss Phyllis Dent on "The Findings of the Conference."

The questions discussed by the ten groups into which the Conference divided itself were these:—

1. (*a*) Is the existing work of the right quality and standard?
(*b*) Are women fully availing themselves of existing opportunities for service in the Church? And if not, why not?
2. (*a*) How far do existing facilities for training meet the needs of the Church and the workers at the present time?
(*b*) How is vocation for Church work to be fostered?
3. (*a*) In order that women's Church work should receive proper recognition from the Church as a whole, should there be an authorized form of organization in every diocese? If so, how can this be achieved?

- (b) What are the next most important steps to be taken in furtherance of the aims of this Conference?
4. (Arising out of the previous discussions.)
- (a) How can we think out a scheme for permanent recruiting work for the Church?
- (b) In what way can a Board of women's work help this?
- (c) How can we tide over the years between school-leaving age and the time when actual training for Church work may begin?
- (d) It is suggested that there might be a Central Training College for lay women's work to which people might go for one or two years before specializing for the Diaconate or the Mission Field or other branches of Church work. Discuss this.

As in discussion some of the questions necessarily mingled, the findings of the Conference are taken, for the sake of clearness and order, under the heads: The Present Situation, Vocation, Training, Organization.

The Present Situation.

"Every great need of to-day is a spiritual one and again and again it is only women who can touch and meet it." "God needs both men and women for the salvation of souls. There are services that women can do much better than men and the Church must make free use of women."

"New demands, new needs, new adjustments make us wish to test the work of the Church, not with any disrespect to the past, but so as to meet adequately the new needs."

What then is the situation in regard to the women of to-day and the Church's work?

A great variety of work is being done by women for the Church, much of it of splendid quality, but though the opportunities of service are manifold the younger women, especially the educated, are responding to them very little.*

Most of them do not think of Church work at home as worth consideration, though for Mission work overseas some highly educated women do offer themselves. Meanwhile, professional work is overcrowded.

In explanation of this there are (a) causes operating apart from the work itself, and (b) causes operating in connection with the actual work.

*Some members of the Conference thought that the actual posts are not many at present, owing to a lack of money for salaries and a backwardness in giving women responsible work and definite spheres.

In connection with (a) the Conference found that:—

1. Work which used to be done by the Church and which had in it a special appeal to women is now done by the State. The women are doing the same work, but it is now apart from the Church.

2. There is a present wave of selfishness, pleasure-seeking, and avoidance of responsibility which affects all classes.

3. There is theological unrest, fear of party labels, and lack of conviction about the Church's doctrines.

In regard to the last point we must face the fact that this state of things is a result of wrong or ineffectual teaching. The repudiation by the young of parodies of Christianity is often an excuse, but there is something real in it too.

4. A fear of loneliness, dulness, segregation, of a narrow life and interests.

In connection with (b) it was found that:—

1. The standard of much work called "Church work" is not high enough to attract the best workers.

2. Often the nature of the work is not clearly defined and the work is not carefully assigned to the right worker.

3. Workers in parishes are seldom given sufficient scope for applying the modern methods in which they are trained.

4. Women workers are often not treated as colleagues by the clergy.

5. The work is generally so exacting that there is little time for study and self-development.

6. Prospective workers are lost because there is no means of tiding over the years between leaving school and beginning work.

7. There has been a mistrust of youth and its capacity for taking responsibility.

8. In the call to work there has been a lack of appeal to the spirit of adventure and self-sacrifice.

9. There has not been sufficient propaganda, especially in the upper classes of schools and in the universities.

10. The economic conditions of women's work are bad. Training is costly, salaries are low, tenure is insecure, and there is no provision for pensions.

To diminish the adverse causes operating in connection with the work, the desire was expressed for an *authoritative policy, for better organization, and for more propaganda.* The first two are more fully dealt with under "Organization."

Among some constructive suggestions made were these :—

(a) That there should be a central Bureau for women's Church work, which would make known the needs and possibilities, and would be a clearing house for offers of service.

(b) That diocesan grants should only be given in cases where a living wage is offered to the worker.

To prevent the loss of girls between school age and the time when they could take up definite work, it was suggested that a central college might be established for them, where domestic science and theology and social science might be taught on a spiritual foundation; but, on the whole, the feeling of the Conference was that it was a more wholesome and a better preparation for girls to live a normal life for a time after leaving school and to engage in ordinary occupations. Some way of keeping them in touch, like the Young People's Union, should be devised in every diocese.

In regard to adverse causes operating apart from the work, obviously these can only be met by general changes of outlook, mind, and character; but the Conference desired to urge a larger view of Church Work: "That all work consecrated by the desire to meet the needs of the world in the Name of Christ is Church Work," and that the attempt to awaken and foster a sense of vocation in ordinary life should be made early.

The Conference completely endorsed Miss Rouse's opinion that the key to gaining recruits for the Church's work and to securing the right quality and standard in it is the presentation of the Vision of the Purpose of God for the whole world and of all service (however humble) and every life in relation to that. There is response to "a great dominating idea." Christ has the solution of the problems of the whole of life. If every girl confirmed could get a sense of *desperate* need (as women did in the war)—the desperate need of the world and of our Lord for helpers—they would come.

Vocation.

The Conference believed strongly that a sense of responsibility and care for human need should be instilled in children early, and that the sense of Christian vocation in ordinary life, not merely for specialized work, should be fostered from earliest days. The purpose of God for the world and the truth that He has a purpose for each individual life should be taught in the home, at school, in preparation for confirmation, and by every means.

Adolescents should be given jobs in parishes, and learn to love service by doing it.

Out of this will arise a response to special vocations. Vocation comes not only by the inward call, but also by the outward—through other people and circumstances. The use of Retreats for young people in awakening and fostering a response to vocation is proving itself, and this means should spread. The variety of the work to be done should be made better known; and there ought to be more such opportunities of training for girls of primary education as are presented by St. Brigid's Hostel.

The Preparation Union plan of the missionary societies might well be followed for Home Service; a sense of vocation should be fostered by Communicants' Guilds, G.D.A. weeks, &c., and clergy and Church workers should watch for leaders.

A Diocesan Council of Youth, or a Recruiting Committee of the Diocesan Board of Women's Work, to be in touch with young people in the dioceses, were recommended. The Boards of Women's Work had a very important part to play here by acting as a stimulus and as a bureau of information and advice.

The Bishop of Kingston expressed the feeling of the Conference in saying: "We do not need a new special Recruiting Campaign, but we need to use every existing agency to counter ideas of mere self-development, to teach the young that the only justification of their life is that they must give to the community, not just get. It would not take a great deal to switch them over from the one idea to the other, because the wish to be themselves and use their gifts is met and best satisfied by the ideal of Christian consecration."

The Bishop of Hulme, in a moving address on vocation, pointed to the example of the saints, and asked: "Why should we take it for granted that the best and most attractive people, with their splendid gifts of youth, health, and beauty will not hear the call?"

Training.

There is a great deal of excellent and trained work being done for the Church by women, but there is a great deal also that is poor in standard and quality. The latter is not always the fault of the worker, but is often caused by lack of opportunity for improvement and by adverse circumstances.

In considering "whether existing facilities for training meet the needs of the Church," the Conference decided that

the basis for thought on the subject must be not "the paid and unpaid work," but "the *whole* and *part-time* worker," whether paid or unpaid.

There was general agreement that our line of advance must be in the direction of better training and in the direction of trying to increase the desire for training.

All workers should submit to some training, but there must be a great difference in training between the whole and the part-time workers. New and suitable opportunities of training should be offered to part-time workers.

A fear was expressed lest the intellectual side of training should ever hide the spiritual, or theory should be divorced from practice. This would be to limit the word "training" to efforts which we make on the intellectual side. "There should be a clear distinction between training and education."

Training must be not only intellectual, but devotional, practical as well as theoretical; it should go deeper than it usually does at present. "If training fails to foster a spirit of self-surrender it will be valueless."

The Conference considered (1) Intensive training in residential colleges, and (2) Extensive training through lectures, summer schools, tutorial classes, &c.

1. The accommodation at our Church training colleges seems sufficient at the moment for residential training, but would not be so were the demand increased.

The following points were made:—

(a) It is better, on the whole, to have a few Central Training colleges than many diocesan ones (there are gains in larger fellowship, better staff, and economy).

(b) It is best, perhaps, that these should be hostels near universities, so that students may share the general life and advantages of the university while having the benefit of the spiritual life, discipline, fellowship, and the individual help, which such a training house, based on a strong spiritual foundation, should give.

(c) Arrangements should be made at such training colleges for short courses to which people might come for testing.

(d) The training should be elastic and such as will meet modern needs.

The management should be on the lines of self-government.

There should be abundant leisure for devotion and recreation.

There should be a good general library, with magazines. The training should widen the mind and interests, as it has not always done hitherto.

Emphasis should be on spiritual vocation rather than on the work as a profession.

For the balance of the Christian character the life should be natural and happy, and yet there should be no mistaking the call to self-surrender and self-sacrifice.

The training should lead to the formation of habits of prayer and self-discipline.

The whole training course would be better for three years than for two.

Refresher courses will have to be supplied.

(e) A bursary system must be built up in order to support each year more of those who seek training.

(f) It would be an advantage if the lonely Church worker could have the opportunity of attending a short course at a training house and of being "attached" to it for fellowship and encouragement.

(g) In a training centre for home and overseas service, could special short courses for country workers be arranged? So that these and candidates for overseas work could for a time be side by side.

(h) The Church should have a uniform standard of training, and a hope was expressed that all dioceses may accept the standard of the Inter-Diocesan Council.

The existing training houses ought to be made better known. It is most desirable that representatives of women's Church work, interested in recruiting, and the heads of training houses should confer, in order that the opportunities offered by the training houses may be better known, and in order to develop training so as to meet the needs of different kinds of workers.

It was suggested that the I.D.C. should arrange such a Conference.

The idea of a Central Church Training College was considered; to which girls might go first for testing, passing on afterwards to special Training Houses (Deaconesses', Sunday School, Missionary Colleges). But the Conference felt that it would be better to wait and watch the experiment at Selly Oak and see how far the new development of the College of the Ascension there would meet the need.

2. There was a practically unanimous opinion that while training facilities exist for highly educated and town people almost nothing exists for training people in the country. Therefore, for those who cannot come into residence for training there should be a properly organized system of help.

General training weeks (on the lines of the missionary schools now being held about the country), and short conferences, for all sorts of country Church workers together should be arranged, and various societies might unite in providing them. The help of women messengers might be enlisted. Correspondence courses and tutorial classes could be more used. A Postal Library might be started for country Church workers. A Committee appointed to give special consideration to the needs of country districts might be useful.

The Conference was much interested in Mrs. Bell's scheme. Saying that this was the psychological moment for helping voluntary work and workers in the country to a fresh advance, she described the difficulties of the country worker and suggested that there should be in every Rural Deanery or country town a woman who would organize and train; she should be a full-time worker, backed by the bishop's license and diocesan recognition; acting as a centre of fellowship and counsel, a bureau of information, and a recruiter, she would bring training to the country worker, sustain her in the loneliness of her work, and draw others in to help in a variety of ways according to their gifts.

A striking thing in the Conference was the fact that missionary and home work and training were thought of and treated together really for the first time.

Organization.

"Hitherto women have been tinkering at the organization of their work for the Church, what is wanted now is a *policy from the top.*"

But first, what is the present position as regards organization? In many dioceses either there is none or it is sterile.

Meanwhile, there is a growing specialization and departmentalism in different kinds of work, leading to some disregard of the work of the Church as a whole. This can only be remedied if it is recognized that all such service is rendered to the Church as a whole, and that the diocese is the co-ordinating unit.

Again, while personal devotion and loyalty to our Lord is, of course, always essential in Church work; yet there should be a recognition and a status given by the Church to those who undertake such work. Quite clearly the undertaking of such work must not be made dependent upon the possession of private means.

Boards of Women's Work are not appointed, or do not function, because it is not realized that women's work needs

diocesan co-ordination (*a*) to protect workers and to uphold a high standard of work, (*b*) to prevent over-lapping, (*c*) to advise in the cases where there is dual control, (*d*) to determine a minimum wage and make provision for pensions, (*e*) to bring together the various kinds of work and workers, as the Diocesan Missionary Council brings together various missionary interests, and to be a stimulating, living centre for counsel, fellowship, and progress.

It appears that compared with what it might be in greater effectiveness for the Church, women's work is somewhat chaotic, undirected, unequally and wastefully used, owing to lack of organization.

There should be a roll or register of women workers in each diocese.

There is no recognized central authority for dealing with women's work for the Church, and a need for this begins to be felt and to be articulate.

An explanation of the objects and organization of the Central Conference of Women's Church Work and of the Inter-Diocesan Council was given by Mrs. Cockin, who, believing that there was a clearly expressed desire for some central co-ordinating body to fulfil certain necessary functions, pleaded that it might be "organic," i.e., linked up with central bodies in the diocese and outside it.

She asked members of the Conference to go further in their thinking about the central body they desired, and the possible relation of the two organizations mentioned to one another and to any central body proposed.

Suggestions were made:—

That organization must be on the lines of the Church Assembly.

That the Church Assembly might have a Council for Lay Work (both men and women) like the Missionary Social Service Councils.

That the Central Conference of Women's Church Work, reconstituted, and the Inter-Diocesan Council extended, might form parts of a Central Board.

Attention was called to

The Lambeth Conference (1920) Recommendation (page 106 of the Report) and the resolutions passed by the Convocation of York and generally approved by the Convocation of Canterbury, in 1922.

From these it is seen that Diocesan Boards for women's work are not the invention and demand of a few unimportant

people, but are urged by the high authority of the Lambeth Conference, which has outlined their functions, while Convocation has given general approval to the Resolution that "There shall be in each diocese a Diocesan Committee for women's work," assigning to this Committee definite and important functions.

The Conference, therefore, agreed:—

That an authority for women's work ought to be established in every diocese, and that the formation of Advisory Boards recommended by the Lambeth Conference in 1920 and Convocation in 1922, should be pressed forward in dioceses where they do not already exist.

That these bodies should work along the lines laid down in the Lambeth Conference Recommendation; and that they should have a definite official relation to the Diocesan Conference and report to it.

A report of the present Conference should be sent to the Bishops and to the Secretaries of Diocesan Conferences, and its findings should be widely circulated.

It was suggested that the whole subject of women's work should be discussed by Diocesan Conferences as soon as possible.

As to a Central Board, in the words of our Chairman: "We are not yet in a position to say what exactly the Central Board should be and do. If we say that we believe that there should be one, that is as much as we have the capacity and right to say. Diocesan Boards must be established first, then a central co-ordinating authority will be seen to be needed.

"The first and immediate step is to get live, working Advisory Boards in every diocese. In fact all women's work ought to go forward with the Lambeth Conference Recommendations as its charter."

Unanimity upon certain fundamental principles was a marked feature of the discussions and made us feel that a general conference, which brings together people who are working in many different departments, is of immense value, giving a sense of solidarity and fellowship and of simultaneous discovery of principles.

The main lines of agreement were on (1) The importance of fostering vocation, especially from early childhood. (2) The need for the development of training, and training houses,

along modern lines, and to meet various requirements. (3) The necessity of a definite policy and a proper recognition *from the Church as a whole* for women's work. (4) The desire for a Board of women's work in every diocese in accordance with the Lambeth Conference Recommendation.

Appendix 1.

Resolution 54 of Lambeth Conference, 1920. (Page 41.)

"The Conference recommends that careful enquiry should be made in the several branches of the Anglican Communion as to the position and recognition of women workers in the Church, the conditions of their employment, and the remuneration of those who receive salaries."

Recommendation from Report of the Committee on the Ministry of women. Lambeth Conference, 1920. (Page 106.)

"We believe that the security against possible evils and defects lies in diocesan organization, and that this security would be provided by a recommendation we put forward which deals with the whole range of women's work in the Church and with which we conclude our report.

"We submit that in every diocese there ought to exist a Board of women's work, including among its members men as well as women. This Board would endeavour both to inspire and to direct women workers of all kinds within the diocese. All approved women workers would be placed upon its roll. It would be ready to give them counsel. It would arrange for Retreats and Quiet days, and take other measures for building up the spiritual life of those who bear a heavy strain of work and difficulty and disappointment. It would advise and encourage those younger women who are considering the call to Church work. But among its other functions this Board would always include these two. It would draw up and carry out a scheme whereby certificates of ascertained fitness and competence, recognized at least throughout the diocese would be given to women workers qualified in various departments of work. And in the second place it would from time to time consider the questions relating to the training of all women workers in the Church and the conditions of their employment, and also to the remuneration of paid women workers in the Church. By such an organization we are persuaded that their position would be raised and rendered more honourable, and that their efficiency, on which so much depends in the coming years, would be made more uniform and more stable."

(8) Resolutions of Upper House of Convocation. February, 1922.

Clause 1.—That there shall be in each diocese a Diocesan Committee for women's work.

Clause 2.—That the Committee shall be responsible for considering all applications from women for the Bishop's Licence and for testing their qualifications.

Appendix 2.

Suggested constitution of Boards of women's work.

Membership should be of both sexes.

It should consist of members nominated by the Bishop, by the Diocesan Conference, representatives of the rural deaneries, representatives of all branches of women's work in the diocese, representatives of training centres, and of education, in the diocese.

There should be cross representation from the Board of Finance and the Evangelistic Council.

