

That Handful of Women

A Skit about the Beginnings of United Methodist Women

Editor's Note: This skit was first introduced at the National Gathering of Teen and College Women, December 2000 in St. Charles, Ill. It's an interactive melodrama that involves the audience and teaches them of the history of women organized for mission.

THAT HANDFUL OF WOMEN is a Melodrama of the Organizing of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1869. This play is meant to be extremely melodramatic and over-emphasized, especially in actions. It will resemble a silent movie in some respects with the audience providing the sound effects while the cast of six pantomime the actions. The pace is very slow with some uncomfortable pauses between the speaking parts and the audience reaction. Those speaking should actually talk to the audience in anticipation of their response.

CAST:

- Announcer to give instructions
- Narrator
- Six women dressed in period clothing, 1869.
- Mrs. Edwin Parker
- Mrs. William Butler

PROPS:

- Powerpoint slides or instruction cards for the whole audience to read.
- Props that help re-create the 1869 setting.

SCENE:

The cast of six women, dressed in period clothing, with overcoats, hats, and umbrellas, stand frozen in position, ready for action when the first light appears on stage.

Announcer: This afternoon, we will be re-creating the very first meeting of women organized for mission. Our actors on the stage will portray a handful of women who are the founders of our present-day organization of United Methodist Women. You, as the audience, will also have a part to play. You will be the sound effects for our melodrama. Your parts will appear on the screens, and you should respond immediately with the action, words or sounds as indicated. This half of the audience will be the left side, and this half will be the right side. Please take your parts very seriously and respond with energy and enthusiasm when it is your turn.

The actions displayed on the screen are for the audience to perform. Using a split screen, instructions are given for the left side (L) and the right side (R) of the auditorium. Each slide should be displayed for 10 seconds as follows:

- SLIDE 2:** L: RUB YOUR HANDS TOGETHER. R: SIT QUIETLY.
- SLIDE 3:** L: SNAP YOUR FINGERS. R: RUB YOUR HANDS TOGETHER.
- SLIDE 4:** L: PAT YOUR HANDS ON YOUR THIGHS. R: SNAP YOUR FINGERS.
- SLIDE 5:** L: CLAP YOUR HANDS. R: PAT YOUR HANDS ON YOUR THIGHS.
- SLIDE 6:** L: STOMP YOUR FEET. R: CLAP YOUR HANDS.
- SLIDE 7:** L: SIT QUIETLY. R: STOMP YOUR FEET.
- SLIDE 8:** STOP.

Narrator Voice over:

It was a dark and stormy night in Boston on March 23, 1869.

Audio of eerie organ music. The lights come up 114 center stage as the cast of six begin to remove their coats, shake out their umbrellas, remove their hats, dry off with handkerchiefs, and take their seats in the meeting room. They do not talk but pantomime talking to one another, greeting one another, and making conversation. They help themselves to the tea on the coffee table, sipping, with pinky fingers extended and showing the utmost dignity and proper etiquette. They do not cross their legs when they sit, but can cross their ankles, and sit rather side-ways in their chairs, their backs not touching the back of the chair, with absolute correct posture.

SLIDE 9: L: CLAP YOUR HANDS. R: STOMP YOUR FEET.

As the lights come up,, two women enter from the doors of the auditorium and walking down the center aisle. Both are carrying opened umbrellas, dressed in period clothing, and struggling against the imagined wind and rain as they make their way to the stage.

SLIDE 10: L: SNAP YOUR FINGERS. R: MAKE THE SOUND OF WIND.

Narrator Voice over:

Mrs. William Butler and Mrs. Edwin Parker, wives of missionary husbands to India, arrive at Tremont Street Methodist Episcopal Church. Six other women have already gathered to hear them speak.

As Mrs. Butler and Mrs. Parker reach the stage, the lights come up full. Both women remove their rain gear, dry off with handkerchiefs, and begin to greet the women, shaking hands every so daintily, each woman rising to return the greeting, tea cup in hand, and curtsies. Mrs. Butler and Mrs. Parker help themselves to tea and then take their seats. They take the tea cups in hand and sip, then place their cups on the side table. Fade organ music.

Mrs. Butler: *(Clearing her throat)* Ladies, thank you for coming.

SLIDE 11: L:APPLAUSE. R: CHEER.

Mrs. Parker: We know how treacherous the weather is tonight.

SLIDE 12: L: CLAP YOUR HANDS. R: STOMP YOUR FEET.

Mrs. Butler: We hope this will not cause you ill health.

Each of the six women either coughs gently into her handkerchief or sneezes delicately in a high pitch into her handkerchief

SLIDE 13: "God bless you."

Mrs. Parker: Ladies, we have some very important news to tell you ...

Mrs. Butler: About the plight of women and girls in India.

Musical chords. Each of the six women covers her mouth in horror, a few say "oh, my."

SLIDE 14: GASP.

Mrs. Parker: Please, ladies, hear us out.

SLIDE 15: SHHH.

Mrs. Butler: The girls are not being educated.

SLIDE 16: "Oh no!"

Mrs. Parker: There are only male doctors, and they will not treat women.

SLIDE 17: "This can't be!"

Mrs. Butler: Please, ladies, we must do something.

Mrs. Parker: Yes, our help is greatly needed.

SLIDE 18: "What can we **do**?"

Mrs. Butler: Oh, thank you for asking.

SLIDE 19: "You're welcome."

Mrs. Parker: We think we have a plan.

Mrs. Butler: But it will require our being a bit unruly.

SLIDE 20: HISS.

Mrs. Parker: Now, now, it's not all that bad.

Mrs. Butler: After all, we are proper Christian women.

SLIDE 21: Amen.

Mrs. Parker: We would not want to do anything to upset the men.

Mrs. Butler: Oh, goodness, no.

SLIDE 22: "Why not?"

Mrs. Parker: (*Looking to Mrs. Butler for reassurance*) Well then, here is our plan.

Mrs. Butler: We are going to raise the money

Mrs. Parker: To send a woman educator

Mrs. Butler: And a woman doctor

Mrs. Parker and Mrs. Butler In unison: To India.

SLIDE 23: LAUGH

Mrs. Parker: Oh dear, Mrs. Butler, I was afraid of this.

Mrs. Butler: Now, Mrs. Parker, do not fret. This is not the time to lose courage.

SLIDE 24: **SNIFFLE.**

Mrs. Parker: Ladies, please, we must work together.

Mrs. Butler: Yes, Mrs. Parker, that's right, we must.

Mrs. Parker: If we women don't band together for our sisters in India

Mrs. Butler: Who will?

Mrs. Parker: The girls will be left uneducated,

Mrs. Butler: And the women without medical care.

Mrs. Parker and Mrs. Butler (*In unison*): They shall surely perish!

Eerie music for a few chords.

Mrs. Butler: In God's name, we must do something.

SLIDE 25: **"But how can we help?"**

Mrs. Parker: Oh, I'm so glad you asked.

SLIDE 26: **"You're welcome."**

Mrs. Butler: We can raise the money

Mrs. Parker: By wearing cheap calico robes,

Mrs. Butler: Instead of buying these expensive fashions.

SLIDE 27: **SCREAM**

Mrs. Parker: Now, ladies, there's no need to over-react.

Mrs. Butler: Please, do maintain your composure.

SLIDE 28: **CLEAR YOUR THROAT**

Mrs. Parker: Ladies, consider the sacrifices our Lord Jesus has made for us.

Mrs. Butler: It is the least we can do in gratitude and service to Him.

Mrs. Parker: Are we not as much His disciples as the men?

Mrs. Butler: **Called to care for the poor, the widows, the orphans in every land.**

SLIDE 29: "Absolutely."

Mrs. Parker: We could raise the money in no time

Mrs. Butler: If we just deny ourselves some frills.

SLIDE 30: "But calico?"

Mrs. Parker: Yes, well, it is a bit coarse

Mrs. Butler: But it is very durable,

Mrs. Parker: And easy to care for.

Mrs. Butler: Who knows, we might even make a fashion statement.

SLIDE 31: "Calico! Calico!"

Mrs. Parker: Now, that's the spirit.

Mrs. Butler: Praise God, we are united.

SLIDE 32: "Hallelujah!"

Mrs. Parker: I know a woman educator named Isabella Thoburn.

Mrs. Butler: And I know a woman doctor named Clara Swain.

Mrs. Parker: They have agreed to go to India

Mrs. Butler: As our first female missionaries.

SLIDE 33: **APPLAUSE**

Mrs. Parker: We will build a school to educate girls.

Mrs. Butler: And we will build a hospital to provide medical care for women.

SLIDE 34: "Justice! Justice!"

Mrs. Parker: This is going to be the start of something big

Mrs. Butler: Really big.

Mrs. Parker and Mrs. Butler (In unison): And it all begins right here.

SLIDE 35: **CHEERS**

Mrs. Parker: Sisters, let us commend our plans to God's care,

Mrs. Butler: Trusting that God will bring this to pass.

SLIDE 36: "Let us pray."

*Lights begin to fade as the narrator speaks. The women bow their heads and fold their hands in prayer.
START eerie organ music.*

Narrator Voice over: So it was, on that stormy night in Boston on March 23, 1869, that the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized. It was the first of eight women's missionary societies founded by our predecessor organizations. Today, we continue the legacy of women organized for mission as United Methodist Women.

A few begin to stand and embrace one another in congratulations. Some put their raincoats and hats on. All prepare to stand center stage, holding hands, on cue.

Lights come up full as the cast forms one line, joins hands, and takes their bows.

Lights fade to black. The actors exit and the stage is cleared.