

“Fissures in Chicago Methodism in the Progressive Era:  
Three Mission Strategies”

Had you taken a walk around the often unpaved, mud-worn block in an urban tenement neighborhood in Chicago or any other large American city at the turn of the twentieth century, you would have strolled by edifices dedicated to a mission to help the neighborhood, like a settlement house and a Salvation Army rescue mission. No doubt you also would have bumped into women on a similar mission, like an upper-class, Chicago Woman’s Club friendly visitor from the Charity Organization Society, a deaconess dressed in the distinctive garb of a long black, gathered-at-the-waist dress and matching bonnet, and a Salvation Army lassie—a Sallie—wearing clothes that closely approximated the dress of a working-class woman. Each of these worked to circumstances for those living in the tenements—the destitute, prostitute, addict, and immigrant—but their strategies differed markedly, particularly with regard to religion.

A retreat from anything remotely religious characterized the Charity Organization Society movement (COS), founded in 1877. The COS aimed, as its name implied, to organize charity by coordinating the “resources of its community and to refer ‘deserving’ applicants to the appropriate agency.”<sup>1</sup> Its work of visitation and assessment depended on a corps of volunteers known as friendly visitors, many of whom were club women, such as several hundred members of the Chicago Woman’s Club.<sup>2</sup> With optimism and pluck, friendly visitors aimed to inculcate a sense of responsibility in the poor and needy for their own welfare, because the visitors believed such an attitude would reverse an impoverished situation.

Armed with a clear purpose and business-like efficiency, COS friendly visitors walked through and systematically observed city neighborhoods to gather information about

conditions—“street, alley, and sidewalk conditions; housing, schools, and churches; infant mortality rates, numbers of children, and juvenile delinquency; parks, playgrounds, dance halls, saloons, hotels, jails, and courts.”<sup>3</sup> During home visits, they were to notice everything in excruciating detail—“the client’s mental and physical condition, the manners of his children and the domestic skills of his wife, his salary, occupation, affiliations, debts, recreational tastes, and personal peccadillos.”<sup>4</sup> These close inspections enabled the visitors to recommend appropriate forms of aid, if any, to the deserving, and to be the frontline in detecting fraudulent use by “unworthy citizens” who received unnecessary aid.<sup>5</sup> This aspect of the COS sparked condemnation from Jane Addams, founder of Hull House, an early and influential settlement house in Chicago, as well as the anonymous poet who composed this lyric: “The organized charity scrimped and iced / In the name of a cautious, statistical Christ.”<sup>6</sup>

Josephine Lowell Shaw, founder and long-time director of the New York COS, disavowed “the sentimental, morality-laden, and indiscriminate relief” offered by the Salvation Army rescue mission or other such organizations that integrated religion. Instead, she enthusiastically adhered to COS policy of giving minimal direct relief and then only to those deemed as deserving.<sup>7</sup> According to Shaw, “human nature is so constituted that no man can receive as a gift what he should earn by his own labor without moral deterioration.”<sup>8</sup> Based on this rationale, Shaw challenged the Salvation Army’s plan to increase the number of rescue missions in New York City, charging that even more vagrants would come to town for the free food and shelter. In her position as chair of the Committee on Vagrancy of the Conference of Charities, Shaw held sharp exchanges with Frederick Booth-Tucker, then co-Commander of The Salvation Army in the United States. During their dispute, Shaw declared that “a man had no right to be homeless.” Booth-Tucker’s response was swift and direct. “What can one say to talk

like that? I told her men were homeless and would always be so ... Men starve while their agents are spending money finding out who they are. ... We can't find work for men and women in many cases, but we can relieve distress, and that's what we'll go on doing while they go on investigating.”<sup>9</sup>

While COS visitors refrained from integrating religion into their outreach, the Salvation Army and evangelical rescue workers purposefully reached out to the soul and the body through a combination of evangelism and humanitarianism. Many evangelicals arrived at a tenement with a religious message, only to realize quickly the value of caring for the body as well. Historian Norris Magnuson finds a “large body of earnest evangelicals who entered the slums because of their concern for the souls of men and women, but who soon developed wide-ranging social service programs.”<sup>10</sup> Those engaged in what he calls, evangelical social work, either launched or expanded their institution building during the Progressive Era. Take the Salvation Army. In a span of two decades after founder William Booth commissioned a group of eight to begin work in the United States, a staggering expanse of outreach institutions had already opened from New York to San Francisco, including “forty-nine men’s shelters and five women’s shelters; fourteen rescue homes; twenty-three food depots; twenty-three workshops, factories, and labor yards; twenty slum posts; three farm colonies; three hospitals; and two homes for waifs and strays.”<sup>11</sup> During her tenure as Commander of The Salvation Army in the United States from 1904-1934, Evangeline, the youngest of seven Booth children, doubled the number of institutions from approximately 200 to 400.<sup>12</sup> However, in the midst of such institutionalization, she endeavored to keep at the forefront the Army’s original evangelistic intention. In her speech before the International Missionary Council, a forerunner of the World Council of Churches, she reiterated the significance of individual salvation to the Army’s work. “The question that Salvationists

address to the individual is whether he accepts or rejects Christ. Acceptance means that Christ is admitted to and dwells within the soul.”<sup>13</sup>

Religion in the settlement house movement was a divisive issue. Settlement work, which grew from a handful of settlement houses in the United States in 1890 to more than 400 by 1910, focused on facilitating relationships between settlement workers and their underprivileged neighbors. It provided myriad opportunities for urban neighbors to come together across class boundaries through “lectures, classes, plays, pageants, kindergarten, and child care.”<sup>14</sup> Along with community-based activism, settlement houses emerged as institutions focused on the pressing issues of the day, from immigration and urbanization to poverty and health care. Settlement workers, many with a college degree and middle-class upbringing, purposefully took up residence in tenement neighborhoods and worked with residents to develop supportive ventures, from manual job training courses to a safe neighborhood playground.<sup>15</sup>

Many settlement workers, despite the childhood influence of a religious home, eschewed the direct expression of religious sentiments in deference to the interreligious nature of these neighborhoods.<sup>16</sup> “The typical settlement, under American conditions, is one which provides neutral territory traversing all the lines of racial and religious cleavage,” wrote the editors of the 1911 *Handbook of Settlements*.<sup>17</sup> As we will see, a settlement worker who held this opinion, Mary E. McDowell, even though she was active in a Methodist church as a teenager and young adult, disdained the direct integration of religion into settlement work. However, other settlement workers, argues historian Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn, particularly African Americans, assumed a different stance on religion, because “they shared a culture in which religion played a central role.” She finds that settlement work among African Americans, and also in the South, occurred most often “through missions, institutional churches, or other organizations with a strong

religious component.”<sup>18</sup> Further, she claims that an exclusionary policy on religion often lent a sense of elitism to settlement work.<sup>19</sup>

Methodist women were well represented in this diverse landscape of mission strategies in the Progressive Era. In Chicago alone, three strategies emerged simultaneously under the Wesleyan umbrella: humanitarianism as a means to evangelism (Iva Durham Vennard), humanitarianism and evangelism as complementary tasks (Lucy Rider Meyer) and humanitarianism without any religious component (Mary McDowell). This paper will investigate each strategy, specifically its underlying rationale, practical components, and connection to other Progressive Era organizations. In the conclusion, I will draw insights from this historical case study for developing a mission strategy for the twenty-first century.

#### Humanitarianism as “bait on the hook” for Evangelism: Iva Durham Vennard

Iva Durham Vennard (1871-1945) was converted at age twelve and joined the Methodist Church. Six years later, she claimed sanctification after attending first a holiness meeting in Decatur, Illinois, and then a revival preached by holiness evangelist, the Reverend Joseph H. Smith. Following graduation from Illinois State Normal University in 1890, she taught school for several years before heading into full-time evangelistic work. In 1895, after hearing a lecture on the deaconess movement by Lucy Rider Meyer, she trained as a deaconess in Buffalo, then, as a deaconess evangelist, she traveled to Methodist churches throughout New York state to hold evangelistic meetings. Three years later, her supervisor, Jane Bancroft Robinson, appointed her as deaconess-at-large for the Woman’s Home Missionary Society, and she traveled across the country promoting deaconess work. Even though Vennard protested that this role sidelined her evangelistic work, which remained always her first priority, Robinson did not budge.

At a vocational crossroad, Vennard attended a summer camp meeting in 1897 at Mountain Lake Park in the Allegheny Mountains of Western Maryland. She had come to this Methodist camp meeting ground, bordered by Victorian-style cottages topped with gingerbread trim, set amidst 800 acres of mountain scenery and pristine air, to find respite from her grueling travel schedule and disappointment over her work for the Methodist Deaconess Bureau. She also took the opportunity to be the stenographer recording in shorthand the first Itinerant Institute on Evangelism, a set of lectures given by Smith. Through these lectures, Smith provided a modicum of practical training in evangelism, such as crafting evangelistic sermons, working the altar, and raising money.<sup>20</sup> As Vennard's pen flew across the page, capturing his words in every shorthand dot and line, her own "illumination," as she would later refer to it, took shape for a religious training school steeped in evangelism. Five years later, in 1902, she opened Epworth Evangelistic Institute in St. Louis. She served as principal until 1910, then resigned, moved to Chicago, and founded Chicago Evangelistic Institute (which became Vennard College), a coeducational, holiness training school, which she led for over thirty years until her death in 1945.

Vennard set out a clear, no nonsense mission strategy: Engage in humanitarianism as the "bait on the hook" for evangelism. Evangelism, the presentation of the gospel message, stood as her first priority because she believed that every person must ultimately have to choose either eternal life through salvation in Jesus Christ or eternal damnation. She had already come to this conviction before her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, because she presented it in an essay delivered at the Illinois State Normal University's commencement exercises. In "The Spirit of Negation," she spoke of the conflicted, yet inescapable choice between good and evil that pervaded such literary masterpieces as *Paradise Lost*, *Faust*, and the book of Job. "This mighty struggle between good

and evil,” she declared, “is the essence of all character whether of the race, or of the individual. It is as old as man. It is his life.”<sup>21</sup> She extrapolated that each individual must make this choice while being transported in lifeboats “launched for Eternity.” On each side of the lifeboat, “whirlpools of Temptation”—envy and ambition, cowardice and deceit, greed and selfishness—call out to the passengers.

Continuing on, she declared, “On every side, every craft is threatened. The voyage cannot be abandoned. All have launched for Eternity. They are hurrying to the great Unknown. Is a disaster unavoidable? Must the shattered craft enter the infinite ocean, a wreck? Must life be a tragedy?” These rhetorical questions she answered with a resounding, “No!,” because of “the care of the kind Pilot” who guides to safety the ones who choose the heavenly route; it is these whom God will “anchor victoriously in the peaceful harbor of Heaven.”<sup>22</sup> Amidst this nautical scene, the evangelist’s duty, according to Vennard, is to warn individuals away from Satan’s shore and direct them toward God’s safe harbor. One can almost hear the wistful strains of a verse from Philip Bliss’ hymn, “Brightly Beams Our Father’s Mercy,” which he penned from a seafaring illustration by Dwight L. Moody: “Brightly Beams Our Father’s Mercy from His lighthouse evermore,/But to us He gives the keeping of the lights along the shore./Let the lower lights be burning! Send a gleam across the wave!/Some poor struggling, sinking sailor you may rescue, you may save.”

Evangelism pointed out the path of “permanent reform.”<sup>23</sup> As Vennard would later articulate, “... important as education and humanitarian relief are, nothing short of the new birth through the Holy Spirit can bring souls into vital union with Christ. And this spiritual life and power is imperative if we hope for *permanent reform*. There is a reason why multitudes are ‘submerged.’ Ignorance is one great reason, to be sure, but *sin is at the bottom*, and the same

influences that have brought many to pauperism will keep them there unless they are taught to appropriate the Divine Power, which alone can enable them to conquer. Shiftlessness and drunkenness and immorality will not be cured by anything less than the Atoning Blood.”<sup>24</sup>

Humanitarianism held second place to evangelism, because it dealt with temporary assistance—food, clothing, shelter, job training—as opposed to eternal salvation; nevertheless it remained an integral component of mission. In other words, she did not care *only* about the soul, an all too commonplace stance according to the Rev. Josiah Strong, Congregational minister, General Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance, and early proponent of the Social Gospel. Strong critiqued the following remarks spoken by “a prominent representative” of the church: “The church has no business with a man’s dirty face; the church has no business with a man’s naked back; the church has no business with a man’s empty stomach. The Church has just one business with a man, and that is to save his soul.”<sup>25</sup> Vennard too dismissed such sentiments, noting “We are using humanitarian methods constantly, and must of necessity do so, to come into contact with the people whom we long to serve. We are caring for their bodies, we are educating their minds, we are helping them in business matters ...” “But if we stop there we have not reached the soul. ... The enemy is constantly trying to make us content with mere philanthropy (sic.) But the Spirit of God forces the issue upon us that all this service, Christlike as it is, in its compassionate ministry, is only the bait (sic) on the hook to catch the fish.”<sup>26</sup>

Vennard used the same colloquial fishing analogy to explain her rationale for launching yet another settlement work in Chicago during the Progressive Era. Before opening Wayside Settlement, she had toured several settlement houses in the city, including Jane Addam’s influential Hull House. While Vennard expressed positive observations about their humanitarianism, she noted the absence of “anything distinctively religious,” since settlement

workers “stop short of a personal Saviour offering a full and free salvation to all to whom it ministers.”<sup>27</sup> To the question—Why another settlement in Chicago?—she responded with her fishing analogy. “The answer is simple. We have opened “The Wayside” because we believe that foreigners, poor people, and all classes need salvation. We must do more than serve our people through humanitarian service. These temporal benefits we gladly give, but they are the bait for our hook, and we do not feel that we have ever done our best for a family until we have brought them to know Jesus ...”<sup>28</sup>

### Humanitarianism Without Evangelism: Mary E. McDowell

At the other end of the spectrum from Vennard was another Methodist, Mary E. McDowell (1854-1936), Director of The University of Chicago Settlement. Like Vennard, McDowell became active in a Methodist church at age 12 when her father, whom she idolized, left the Episcopal church to which her mother belonged and joined a little Methodist chapel, which the working-class frequented in the industrial section along the Cincinnati waterfront. As McDowell recounted, “The pillars of the church were ship carpenters, quaint old men whom Charles Dickens would have enjoyed.”<sup>29</sup> She traced what she called her “social faith” to that Methodist chapel, particularly the class meeting held in “Mother” Scherer’s “best room” and led by “Father” Scherer, whose hands were “gnarled” by laborious use. Every week, he asked her, “Well, little sister, how is your soul this week?” Years later, she offered this response to his question:

The soul was a reality to this old saint and became, to the wee girl, a precious something that had to do with my *every-day actions* and life with folks. Since then, all through life it has been to me that self that must win out in the end,

by ‘doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly’ as the sacrifice well pleasing to the Heavenly Father. “Father” Sherer, with all his limitations, when he laid his old hands on my young head stamped upon my imagination a pattern to follow and consecrated me to right relationships with my fellows.<sup>30</sup>

She grasped an opportunity to put her “social faith” into practice when, shortly after the family moved to Chicago, the great Chicago fire broke out. McDowell, now seventeen, spearheaded the evacuation of refugees and their belongings using the family horse hitched to an old wagon.

When her family moved again to Evanston, north of the city, she and her father became active in the First United Methodist Church in Evanston, which Frances Willard also attended. Her father became a class leader of young adults, and together they read—and immersed themselves—in Washington Gladden’s *Applied Christianity*. This book, according to historian Susan Curtis, solidified McDowell’s belief that religion must “express itself in the *everyday actions* of those who professed it.”<sup>31</sup> And that’s what she did through her settlement work, for a brief time with Jane Addams at Hull House, then for forty years as Director of The University of Chicago Settlement House in the city’s Twenty-ninth Ward, or “Back of the Yards,” so named due to its close proximity to the Chicago stockyards.

McDowell’s “everyday actions” through her settlement work were wide ranging. She, along with her neighbors, successfully lobbied the city to keep the neighborhood’s alleys cleaner with trash receptacles at each back gate and for a public bathhouse which, in August, 1900, was used by 12,000 people. For the children of the neighborhood, she spent \$25 to create a simple playground with a sandbox and swing, set up garden spaces which for a penny a week, a child had use of it to tend and cultivate vegetables and flowers, launched a vacation school during the summer, and established a kindergarten. Other projects pursued through the settlement house

included a lending library, adult classes in English and citizenship, and open-air movies.

McDowell's "everyday actions" earned her three nicknames: "Fighting Lady" because she stood in solidarity with striking workers in the 1904 stockyards strike; "Garbage Lady" because she organized the neighborhood to carry protests to Chicago's city government to block the dumping of garbage and develop a more systematic plan for disposing of garbage; and "Duchess of Bubbly Creek"—named for a foul ditch with an unsavory smell—because she successfully lobbied for the cessation of stockyard refuse being dumped into the branch of the Chicago River that ran alongside the neighborhood.

Her biographer noted that she was not an "active church worker, but she writes of having hoped in 1894 that the residents of Packingtown might recognize the religion she was trying to express by moving into their neighborhood. Not that the Settlement could identify itself with any one religious group; only that its spirit was one with the spirit which, to McDowell, was religion."<sup>32</sup> She drew a sharp contrast between settlement houses and missions, like Vennard's Wayside Settlement, when she spoke at the 1908 national conference of Methodist social workers in St. Louis. "Some one has said that where the mission sees sinners, the settlement sees citizens, and that where one believes in converting the individual, the other says the environment also must be converted, believing that pasture is at least as strong, if not stronger, than breed." She then categorically denounced adopting any preconceived agenda for a neighborhood, particularly a religious one; instead, she cautioned settlement workers to wait patiently and work humbly for acceptance by their neighbors. Settlement work should have no "definite propaganda," but simply go on "living with folks and responding to their needs as they make demands upon them."<sup>33</sup> Her dismissal of religion as a component of settlement work corresponded with the stance of the National Federation of Settlements (NFS), an organization

which she, Jane Addams, and other leading settlement leaders helped to found. The NFS eschewed the direct expression of religious sentiments in deference to the interreligious nature of tenement neighborhoods.<sup>34</sup>

### Humanitarianism Alongside Evangelism: Lucy Rider Meyer

Between Vennard's and McDowell's strategies stood Lucy Rider Meyer's, a strategy that balanced humanitarianism and evangelism more equitably and winsomely. Meyer (1849-1922) was a Methodist standout by all counts: a prominent lay leader, the first laywoman to be seated as a delegate to the General Conference in 1904, and a pioneer of the deaconess movement. Raised in a Methodist home, she was converted at age thirteen. Her education was extensive, including a Bachelor of Arts from Oberlin College, studies in Chemistry at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and, in later life, a medical degree from Woman's Medical College, Northwestern University. Prior to her deaconess work, she worked as a staff member for the Illinois State Sunday School Association, traveling throughout the state to churches, church conventions, and Sunday school gatherings. She found herself dumbfounded by how little churchgoers knew of the Bible. " ... I became greatly impressed," she confided, "with the astonishing, and to me alarming ignorance of the Bible on the part of our Church people, Sunday-school teachers, and Christian workers. My own knowledge of the word of God was superficial enough, but when I saw people looking for Jude in the Old Testament, or for one of the minor prophets in the New, I realized the great need of more thorough and comprehensive Bible study on the part of those who were, or might become religious teachers."<sup>35</sup>

Meyer went on to found the first Methodist deaconess training school, the Chicago Training School for City, Home and Foreign Missions, to which she added within a few years the

Chicago Deaconess Home. For over thirty years, she was its primary fundraiser, Bible teacher, and principal, while her husband, Josiah Shelley Meyer, worked alongside her as its business agent. By the time they retired, no less than forty agencies—hospitals, orphanages, training schools, and homes for the elderly—could trace their existence to the work of Lucy and Josiah Rider and graduates of the Chicago Training School.<sup>36</sup> These agencies were staffed by deaconesses who had been trained to make a difference—in physical terms—among the people they visited. From visiting in city jails to teaching street children, from cleaning dirty tenement apartments to nursing the sick and dying, deaconesses served as early social workers, as historian Mary Agnes Dougherty argues, before the growing professionalization of the social work field edged them out.<sup>37</sup>

At the same time, Meyer made sure that deaconesses incorporated religion into their humanitarianism. From her work experience with the Sunday School Association, she made sure that Bible study comprised a large portion of the education deaconesses received. At the Chicago Training School, for at least an hour every morning, five days a week, deaconesses-in-training studied both the content and context of all 66 books of the Bible. They learned as well how to develop Bible lessons that included maps, charts, and simple drawings intended to reinforce lessons. During the afternoons, deaconesses-in-training took the Bible with them as they visited house-to-house in city neighborhoods. Bible in hand, they tended the sick, impoverished, addicted, and dying. The impact of this commitment to the connection between Bible study and practical service is staggering. In one year alone, 1887-88, deaconesses-in-training paid more than 5,000 visits to homes and incorporated Bible readings and prayer in close to 600 homes; they also taught over 19,000 Bible lessons in Sunday Schools and more than 8,000 in Industrial Schools, all in a single year.<sup>38</sup> United Methodist deaconesses today carry on this tradition,

exemplified by Meyer, in which Bible study and practical work strengthen the effectiveness of each other. As deaconess Kandi Mount explains, “We have a sterling example before us of Lucy Rider Meyer. She incorporated Biblical knowledge for use as practical knowledge. I, too, find that a fine way to work and to live.”<sup>39</sup>

Along with Bible study, Meyer was committed personally to evangelism. She held her own belief about its importance, as she expressed in her article, “Deaconesses and the Need:”

A work for which God the Father spared not his own Son may well claim *the intensest energies of every one of us*, until it is done. But what my art, my literary pursuits, my society? May I not live for them? No, no, no! In a world full of souls with eternal life or death just before them – souls every one of whom has cost the heart’s blood of a God to redeem – no one has a right to live for art, or for literature, or for science, or society, or wealth. ... All these things God intends as means and means alone – not an end – not to live for. We may use them just as long as they ... can be used directly in furthering God’s work ... To amass money that one may simply have it – O foolish one. ‘This night shall thy soul be required of thee.’ It is to lie down, after all, in an empty coffin.<sup>40</sup>

She expressed this evangelistic charge in the training of deaconess visitors and deaconess evangelists in visitation and evangelism. Along with courses in Bible, church discipline, and church history, deaconesses-in-training selected from elective courses offered in Individual Evangelism, World Wide Evangelism, and The Psychology of Evangelism.<sup>41</sup> They then devoted two hours on two afternoons a week in practical field work. As Meyer explained, “It is not a light matter to undertake in any degree to be the spiritual guide and help of an immortal soul; and

those who are to make this their constant work should be as well prepared as possible, by qualities both natural and acquired.”<sup>42</sup> Before embarking on their visitation rounds, students and instructors gathered for a prayer service, where they asked “for direction as to the words we spoke and the tracts we gave.” To illustrate that these prayers were not perfunctory, Meyer told a brief story about the transformation sparked by visitation. “In one home we found a young man very sick and unsaved. He said he ‘didn’t know how.’ We read some verses from the Bible and prayed with him, explaining as well as we could how simple the way of salvation is. He begged us to call again and we shall try to do so.”<sup>43</sup>

Data from historian Mary Agnes Dougherty’s study on Methodist deaconesses confirm the high percentage of deaconesses in evangelism. In her statistics on the career profiles of 509 deaconesses who graduated from Meyer’s training school, the number of deaconess evangelists—88—nearly equaled the number of deaconess nurses—87.<sup>44</sup> The highest number in any category of deaconess work were deaconess visitors—381.<sup>45</sup> This last number helps to measure the full extent of evangelistic work among deaconesses because the visitor was often also an evangelist who shared the gospel. Meyer herself explained that a deaconess visitor rejoiced “in little children rescued, souls saved, and the ‘sweetness and light’ of the gospel penetrating homes and hearts till now in the darkness and shadow of death.”<sup>46</sup> Given this profile of a deaconess visitor, Dougherty’s number of 381 deaconess visitors should be added to the 88 deaconess evangelists for a total of 469 deaconesses out of 509 who were engaged in evangelism. Attention to the spiritual as well as the physical needs of a person, in Dougherty’s opinion, separated the deaconess movement from the settlement movement, two movements that otherwise she finds to be quite similar. She concludes with this statement that encapsulates Meyer’s holistic strategy, “Convinced that the whole person, body, mind, and spirit had to be

considered in any philosophy of social work, deaconesses were pre-disposed to lament the purely secular social settlement's insistence on the elimination of religion."<sup>47</sup>

### A Holistic Mission Strategy for the Twenty-first Century

Meyer's holistic strategy, in my estimation, with its combined attention to evangelism and humanitarianism provides the optimal foundation for mission. At the same time, elements from Vennard's and McDowell's strategies make contributions to Meyer's strategy that will strengthen it even more. From Vennard's strategy, it is the attention to evangelism, an activity that many Christians want to eschew because the very thought of it makes them uncomfortable. As an evangelism committee member in a local church put it, "The word *evangelism* kind of unnerves me and I think it unnerves a lot of people. ... When you say 'evangelism,' people think Holy Roller."<sup>48</sup> The result is even well-intentioned, faithful Christians run from it. Or, there is the prevalent viewpoint that if Christians and non-Christians just rub shoulders together, "they'll catch a dose of the gospel." However, as Ron Sider, founder of Evangelicals for Social Action and professor at Palmer Theological Seminary, asserts, "Evangelism rarely happens by osmosis."<sup>49</sup> Former Methodist Bishop in Bolivia, Mortimer Arias, agrees. In this plenary address to the 1975 Nairobi Assembly of the World Council of Churches, he made this statement about evangelism, "Let us say at once that all action that claims to be evangelistic will have to 'name the Name that is above all names,' attempt the crossing of the frontier between faith and non-faith, and communicate the Good News in some way or other and to some degree."<sup>50</sup>

An emphasis on evangelism, however, does not mean doing anything to promote or prompt a religious conversion. Critics concerned about merging evangelism with humanitarianism often evoke the pejorative term, "rice Christians." They contend that a religious

conversion might be conveniently conjured in order to receive the promised incentive. In a retrospect of mission work in his country, a Chinese bishop suggests that the enticement of western money created superficial Christian converts, or “rice Christians.” He writes, “ ... China was the country in which the western missionary societies spent the most money and the field to which they sent the most missionaries. But the number of Christians was never large, and of that number quite a few were ‘rice’ Christians.”<sup>51</sup> It is essential, therefore, not only to recognize but also take steps to minimize the power dynamic of humanitarianism alongside evangelism.

From McDowell’s strategy, it is the attention to wide ranging “everyday actions,” including direct political action, like hers that struck at the root causes of irresponsible and damaging garbage dumping. In particular, two attributes of McDowell’s actions should be considered for integration into a mission strategy. First, she engaged in these actions as a neighbor, as someone who lived in the community and smelled the same, putrefied garbage stench and walked the same picket line as the striking stockyard workers. For forty years, she lived and worked and acted to improve the neighborhood—her neighborhood—alongside her neighbors. Second, before an action commenced, she had done her homework—hard-nosed observation and statistical research. For instance, she found out that the death rate of babies in her neighborhood was higher than that of the city of Chicago as a whole, and she traced it to the garbage dump. Then, she convened a group of women from the neighborhood—her neighbors—to consider the facts. “ ... the women are studying their precincts, and are putting on to their precinct maps the institutions that are good for the community and those that are bad for the community ... The women are beginning to think as one about conditions that to them are political issues—the death rate of babies, to have clean milk, to bring in all the questions of

wholesome amusements, the censoring of moving pictures. All these things have become very real and practical things to the women of Chicago to work together for.”<sup>52</sup>

Contemporary Methodist missiologist, Dana L. Robert, made the following declaration about mission: “I believe that authentic mission can be judged by whether it moves toward or away from the kingdom of God. Do the activities and spiritualities we employ in any given time and place connect or disconnect us with God’s reign, a reign already begun by Jesus’s ministry on earth but not yet consummated?” This historical case study of three Methodist women in the Progressive Era provides a strategy for mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that is grounded in Lucy Rider Meyer’s balance of evangelism and humanitarianism with Iva Durham Vennard’s evangelistic fervor rooting one side and Mary E. McDowell’s “everyday actions” against injustice rooting the other side.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Regina Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945*. New Haven: Yale University, 1993, 37. In his comprehensive book on the history, growth, and method of the charity organization movement, Frank Watson offered this definition of the COS: “A device to aid all who will work together to find out, need by need, what is the best way out of a given difficulty, best for those on whom the need presses most heavily and best for the community at large; and to aid in seeing each problem through to a final solution, including the removal of all preventable causes of poverty, either by measures the society launches itself or by measures it stimulates others to launch.” [Frank D. Watson, *The Charity Organization Movement in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 106. On the COS and its influential predecessors, see Roy Lubove, *The Professional Altruist: The Emergence of Social Work as a Career, 1880-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1965), 2-5.] The COS was well-established by the turn of the century with one hundred fifty societies across the country, a number that would double again within two decades. Kenneth L. Kusmer, “The Functions of Organized Charity in the Progressive Era: Chicago as a Case Study” *The Journal of American History*, LX (December 1973): 658. For a study of organized charity programs in smaller cities, see John T. Cumbler, “The Politics of Charity: Gender and Class in Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Charity Policy” *Journal of Social History* 14 (Fall 1980): 99-111.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Clapp notes the connection between two committees of the Chicago Woman’s Club – the Philanthropy Committee and the Reform Committee – and the COS movement in Chicago. [Elizabeth Clapp, *Mothers of all Children: Women Reformers and the Rise of Juvenile Courts in Progressive-Era America* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 25,

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27.] These women imbibed the *noblesse oblige* message proclaimed from the pulpit as well as the pages of *Godey's Lady's Book*, which exhorted leisure class women “to venture into even the most unsavory places” in order to contribute a measure of civilization and improvement.

Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Noblesse Oblige: Charity & Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago, 1849-1929* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1982), 17-18.

Visitation in impoverished areas traces a long history in the United States. In New York City, as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg attests, visitation began in the early nineteenth century under the auspices of the Young Men's Missionary Society of New York and the Female Missionary Society. Ward Stafford, a missionary for the Female Missionary Society, encouraged the organization's members to visit the city's wards in a systematic fashion, providing “temporal and religious philanthropy.” Members provided “temporal aid, clothing, and food for the sick and hungry” and integrated a religious component through prayer and Bible distribution. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Religion and the Rise of the American City: The New York City Mission Movement, 1812-1870* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1971), 57-58.

<sup>3</sup> Maureen A. Flanagan, “Gender and Urban Political Reform: The City Club and the Woman's City Club of Chicago in the Progressive Era” *The American Historical Review* 95 (October 1990): 1047.

<sup>4</sup> McCarthy, *Noblesse Oblige*, 132.

<sup>5</sup> Diane Winston, *Red-Hot and Righteous: The Urban Religion of The Salvation Army* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1999), 106.

<sup>6</sup> Max Siporin, “Mary Richmond, A Founder of Modern Social Work” in Mary Richmond's *Friendly Visiting Among the Poor* (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1969), x.

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<sup>7</sup> Kunzel, *Fallen Women*, 37. On the reluctance of the COS to distribute direct aid, see Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University, 1990), 196-97. In her influential, turn-of-the-century book, Mary Richmond, a leader in the COS in several cities, offered six principles about when, how, and to whom to give relief. [Mary Richmond, *Friendly Visiting Among the Poor: A Handbook for Charity Workers* (1899); reprinted Patterson Smith Reprint Series in *Criminology, Law Enforcement, and Social Problems* (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1969), 149-65. See also Elizabeth N. Agnew, “Shaping a Civic Profession: Mary Richmond, the Social Gospel, and Social Work,” in *Gender and the Social Gospel*, 116-35.] Even many orphanages in the Progressive Era operated on the “deserving” principle and “chose to admit only children whose parents were ‘deserving.’” Nurith Zmora, *Orphanages Reconsidered: Child Care Institutions in Progressive Era Baltimore* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1994), 13.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Lubove, *The Professional Altruist*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> *New York Times*, February 7, 1879, 9; quoted in Winston, *Red-Hot and Righteous*, 129. See also Norris Magnuson, *Salvation in the Slums: Evangelical Social Work, 1865-1920*, ATLA Monograph Series, No. 10 (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1977), xiii-xvi. According to Lasch-Quinn, settlement workers also criticized the COS for focusing “on the needy individual rather than trying to alter social conditions.” Lasch-Quinn, *Black Neighbors*, 50.

<sup>10</sup> Magnuson, *Salvation in the Slums*, ix. Magnuson argues that Timothy Smith’s thesis—revivalism and the quest for Christian perfection, as demonstrated in substantial social reform efforts, stood out as the two endeavors animating American Christianity in the first half of the nineteenth century—holds up through the Progressive Era. [Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism & Social Reform* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957).] Aaron Abell’s book on a similar theme

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covers numerous organizations and movements, including the YMCA and YWCA, city churches with established urban mission centers, the Social Christianity movement, the Salvation Army, and mainline theological seminaries, all of which embraced some sort of relationship between evangelism and humanitarianism. [Aaron I. Abell, *The Urban Impact on American Protestantism 1865-1900* (London: Archon, 1962).] Curiously, Abell's earlier study appears only once in Magnuson's book, despite widespread overlap in chronology, organization, and topic.

More recently, Benjamin Hartley considers the juxtaposition of revivalism and social reform in Boston during the same decades covered by Abell and Magnuson. Hartley argues that an eclectic group of Boston evangelicals, with Methodists and holiness folk at the center, pursued an agenda of revivalism and social reform based upon "their desire for sanctification in themselves as well as their city to more perfectly reflect God's will as they understood it." [Benjamin L. Hartley, *Evangelicals at a Crossroads: Revivalism & Social Reform in Boston, 1860-1910* (Durham: University of New Hampshire, 2011), 3.] As the Progressive Era advanced, this two-fold agenda disintegrated, according to Hartley, due to differences over the specific practice of both endeavors. "People who had previously walked side by side began to go in markedly different directions owing to a whole assortment of ideas and strategies surrounding their revivalism and social reform efforts." Hartley, *Evangelicals at a Crossroads*, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Winston, *Red-Hot and Righteous*, 120. See also Lillian Taiz, *Hallelujah Lads & Lasses: Remaking the Salvation Army in America, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2001), 105-08.

<sup>12</sup> Winston, *Red-Hot and Righteous*, 171. For these statistics, Winston references Edward McKinley, *Somebody's Brother: A History of The Salvation Army Men's Social Service Department, 1891-1985*, *Studies in American Religion*, vol. 21 (Lewiston, NY: 1986), 69-71.

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William Booth catapulted the Army's investment in institution building after he, with the help of W. T. Stead, journalist and author of *If Christ Came to Chicago!*, researched, wrote, and published *In Darkest England* in 1890. What commenced in the Army's outreach as a result of this book, according to Paul Phillips, was a "burst of social service on a par with the most successful Social Christian enterprises of the late 1800s." [Paul T. Phillips, *A Kingdom on Earth: Anglo-American Social Christianity, 1880-1940* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University, 1996), 97.] Booth himself launched "The Salvation Army Social Campaign" to promote, among other objectives, the renovation of city shelters into city colonies, where the poor and destitute could find employment along with Christian compassion and the gospel message. Such efforts prompted even Friedrich Engels to commend the Army's work among the poor, because it " ... revives the propaganda of early Christianity, appeals to the poor as the elect, fights capitalism in a religious way, and thus fosters an element of early Christian class antagonism." Frederick Coutts, *Bread for My Neighbour: An Appreciation of the Social Influence of William Booth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978), 11; quoted in William Kostlevy, *Holy Jumpers: Evangelicals and Radicals in Progressive Era America* (New York: Oxford University, 2010), 12.

<sup>13</sup> Evangeline Booth, "Missionary, IMC (International Missionary Council)," The Salvation Army Archives. Simultaneous with this "ambitious program of social and spiritual work," historian Diane Winston notes that the Army "sought spiritual conversion first and foremost, [though] they tended the body as well as the soul." Winston, *Red-Hot and Righteous*, 122, 108.

<sup>14</sup> Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 100.

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<sup>15</sup> In aggregate, 90% of settlement workers had attended college, over 80% finished a bachelor's degree, and over 50% had done graduate work. Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads For Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement, 1890-1914* (New York: Oxford University, 1967), 33-34. Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn critiques contemporary scholarship of the settlement movement for its exclusion of the South and especially of African Americans. Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn, *Black Neighbors: Race and the Limits of Reform in the American Settlement House Movement, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1993), 3-5.

<sup>16</sup> Eleanor J. Stebner, "The Settlement House Movement," in *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America*, eds. Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Indianapolis: Indiana University, 2006): 3:1063. For a discussion of sectarian settlement houses with a decidedly religious purpose and strategy, see Stebner, "The Settlement House Movement," 1063-64. Hartley analyzes the evangelistic goals of the Methodist's University Settlement in Boston in *Evangelicals at a Crossroads*, 151-55.

<sup>17</sup> Robert A. Woods and Albert J. Kennedy, eds. *Handbook of Settlements* (Philadelphia: Russell Sage Foundation, 1911), v.

<sup>18</sup> Lasch-Quinn, *Black Neighbors*, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Lasch-Quinn, *Black Neighbors*, 47.

<sup>20</sup> See Joseph H. Smith, *Training in Pentecostal Evangelism* (Philadelphia: Christian Standard Co., Ltd., 1897).

<sup>21</sup> Iva Durham Vennard, "The Spirit of Negation" (April 17, 1890); Mid-America Nazarene University Archives. Even Walter Rauschenbusch, a leading Social Gospel theologian, expressed similar sentiments: "Spiritual regeneration is the most important fact of any life history. A living experience of God is the crowning knowledge attainable to a human mind. Each one of us needs

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the redemptive power of religion for his own sake, for on the tiny stage of the human soul all the vast world tragedy of good and evil is re-enacted.” Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), 104; quoted in Winthrop S. Hudson, “Walter Rauschenbusch and the New Evangelism” *Religion in Life* 30 (Winter 1960-61): 419.

<sup>22</sup> Durham, “The Spirit of Negation.”

<sup>23</sup> The Salvation Army also adopted the phrase, “permanent reform,” according to historian Herbert Wisbey, “Constant effort was expended to help the girls experience conversion, for it was believed that only this would ensure their permanent reformation.” Herbert A. Wisbey, *Soldiers Without Swords: A History of the Salvation Army in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 100.

<sup>24</sup> “Epworth Settlement” *Inasmuch* 1 (July 1905): 5-6.

<sup>25</sup> Josiah Strong, *Religious Movements for Social Betterment* (New York: Baker and Taylor, 1900), 34-35.

<sup>26</sup> Iva Durham Vennard, “The Evangelistic Department of Deaconess Work,” *Inasmuch* 2 (April 1906): 8. This same terminology endures decades later. See Fagan, “Skid-Row Rescue Missions,” 160.

<sup>27</sup> “The Wayside” *Heart and Life Bulletin* 1 (October and November 1911): 12.

<sup>28</sup> “Wayside Notes” *Heart & Life* 1 (October and November 1911): 15.

<sup>29</sup> Mary E. McDowell, “How the Living Faith of One Social Worker Grew” *Survey* 60 (April 1928): 40.

<sup>30</sup> McDowell, “How the Living Faith of One Social Worker Grew,” 42. Italics added.

<sup>31</sup> Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

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<sup>32</sup> Howard E. Wilson, *Mary McDowell, Neighbor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928) 215.

<sup>33</sup> Mary E. McDowell, "The Value of a Social Settlement in an Industrial Neighborhood," in *The Socialized Church: Addresses before the First National Conference of the Social Workers of Methodism, St. Louis, November 17-19, 1908*, ed. Worth M. Tippy (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1909) 136-37.

<sup>34</sup> Stebner, "The Settlement House Movement," 3:1063.

<sup>35</sup> Lucy Rider Meyer, *Deaconesses: Biblical, Early Church, European, American; With the Story of The Chicago Training School, For City, Home and Foreign Missions, and The Chicago Deaconess Home*, 2nd. ed. (Chicago: The Message Publishing Company, 1889), 90.

<sup>36</sup> Catherine M. Prelinger and Rosemary Skinner Keller, "The Function of Female Bonding: The Restored Diaconessate of the Nineteenth Century" in *Women in New Worlds, Volume II*, eds. Rosemary Skinner Keller, Louise L. Queen, and Hilah F. Thomas (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1982), 326.

<sup>37</sup> Mary Agnes Dougherty, "The Social Gospel According to Phoebe," in *Women In New Worlds: Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition*, Hilah F. Thomas and Rosemary Skinner Keller, eds. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981): 207. She argues this thesis in her dissertation. Mary Agnes Dougherty, "The Methodist Deaconess, 1885-1919: A Study in Religious Feminism," Ph.D. dissertation (University of California, Davis, 1979). See also Carolyn DeSwarte Gifford, "Introduction," in *American Deaconess Movement in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Garland, 1987), 8-10.] Following the lead of Dougherty's study, Sarah Sloan Kreutziger reiterates these same conclusions. "All women of early professional social work, however, owed a debt to their deaconess sisters ... for helping to make 'perfecting society' a legitimate concern

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and subsequent career path for women of the late nineteenth century.” Sarah Sloan Kreutziger, “Going On To Perfection: The Contributions of the Wesleyan Theological Doctrine of Entire Sanctification to the Value Base of American Professional Social Work through the Lives and Activities of Nineteenth-Century Evangelical Women Reformers” (DSW dissertation, Tulane University, 1991), 236. For a study that critiques historians’ overemphasis on social work in the Methodist deaconess movement, see Priscilla Pope-Levison, “A ‘Thirty Year War’ and More: Exposing Complexities in the Methodist Deaconess Movement” *Methodist History* 47:2 (January, 2009): 101-16.

<sup>38</sup> Isabelle Horton, *High Adventure: Life of Lucy Rider Meyer* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1928), 139.

<sup>39</sup> Email to author.

<sup>40</sup> Lucy Rider Meyer, “Deaconesses and the Need” *The Message* 5 (1890): 9. Emphasis added.

<sup>41</sup> This list from a 1910 catalog comprised the course offerings in the Department of Instruction for Evangelism at the Chicago Training School. Isabelle Horton, *The Builders: A Story of Faith and Works* (Chicago: The Deaconess Advocate Co., 1910), 205.

<sup>42</sup> Meyer, *Deaconesses*, 68-69.

<sup>43</sup> Meyer, *Deaconesses*, 111.

<sup>44</sup> Dougherty, “The Methodist Deaconess,” 102.

<sup>45</sup> Dougherty, “The Methodist Deaconess,” 102.

<sup>46</sup> Meyer, *Deaconesses*, 71.

<sup>47</sup> She concludes, “Convinced that the whole person, body, mind, and spirit had to be considered in any philosophy of social work, deaconesses were pre-disposed to lament the purely secular

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social settlement's insistence on the elimination of religion." Dougherty, "The Methodist Deaconess," 121.

<sup>48</sup> Ronald J. Sider, Philip N. Olson, and Heidi Rolland Unruh, *Churches That Make a Difference: Reaching Your Community with Good News and Good Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 64.

<sup>49</sup> Sider, *Churches That Make a Difference*, 63.

<sup>50</sup> Mortimer Arias, "That the World May Believe," *International Review of Mission* 65 (January 1976): 17.

<sup>51</sup> K. H. Ting, "Retrospect and Prospect" *International Review of Mission* 70 (April 1981): 27.

The same claim is made about missionaries in other countries. In an anthropological study of missionary work in postcolonial Zaire, Raija Warkentin states: "There is little doubt that missionaries used material gifts to facilitate acceptance of their spiritual message." Warkentin cites the term, "rice Christians," in this quote about missionaries and education, the primary arena in which material incentives were invoked: "In postcolonial Zaire, the government paid the wages for schoolteachers, but the missions acted as buffers for the uncertain delivery of funds to schools. They did this on the condition that the schools upheld Christian rules of conduct for their teachers and staff. The Protestant mission leader called those who converted to Christianity in order to obtain material goods 'rice Christians.'" Raija Warkentin, "Begging as Resistance: Wealth and Christian Missionaries in Postcolonial Zaire," *Missiology: An International Review* XXIX (April 2001): 146, 149. See also Dana Robert, "Shifting Southward: Global Christianity Since 1945," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24 (April 2000): 50-54, 56-58 and G. Jan van Butselaar, "Christian Conversion in Rwanda: The Motivations," *International Bulletin of*

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*Missionary Research* 5 (July 1981): 111-113. This same criticism appears in a study of rescue missions in the United States. See Fagan, "Skid-Row Rescue Missions, 160.

<sup>52</sup> Mary E. McDowell, "The Significance to the City of Its Local Community Life," in *Readings in the Development of Settlement Work*, Lorene M. Pacey, ed. (New York: Association Press, 1950), 122.