

HISTORY OF CORSAGES FOR MISSIONS

Because the custom of giving fresh flower corsages to Conference and District Officers had grown to such proportions, the Arkansas Conference decided in 1981 that it was time to channel such expenditures into funds for mission causes which was, after all, the purpose of the Women's Society of Christian Service. So it was decided to place an urn on a table, and the person honoring another would place her monetary gift, her name, and the name of the honoree in the urn. The names and amounts would be read once or twice during the meeting.

In 1952, the Nebraska Conference WSCS adopted the idea. Then in 1954, they began using a little white paper tag with a blue ribbon and blue lettering "Corsage for Missions". This was pinned on the honoree by the donor of the gift, in lieu of real flowers, to honor her personally and to provide an over and above gift for missions. The next year, colorful six inch ribbons on which were glued a paper cross or paper flower seal and the words "Corsage for Missions" were used.

In 1955 Cora Perryman, who was guest speaker at the Nebraska Conference WSCS, brought the idea back to her Southwest Missouri Conference WSCS and that was the beginning of Corsage for Missions ribbons in Missouri. However, Southwest Missouri voted to have two types of corsages, one with the ribbon decorated with a gold cross and the words "Special Gift to Missions" written on it. The donor would give \$10.00 for this ribbon. The other ribbon was decorated with a flower WSCS emblem, or picture of a missionary and the words "Corsage for Missions". The donor paid \$1.00 for it. It was thought that this would enable more women to give and receive a corsage, especially in local societies. Missionary pictures used were of the seven women missionaries supported by our Conference.

In the early 1960s, the idea was promoted in the South Central Jurisdiction. While the ribbons vary from Conference to Conference, the gifts to missions have all been above and beyond regular giving.

After 1965, the missionary pictures were discontinued and the WSCS (later UMW) emblem was used on all \$1.00 corsages.

Later a \$5.00 corsage was added. At first the color was changed from year to year. The praying hands were stamped on it to distinguish it from the \$1.00 corsage. Then in 1992, gold ribbon stamped with "Corsage for Missions" and a picture of the praying hands became the standard for this corsage. The white \$10.00 corsage remained a white ribbon with a gold cross and the words "Special Gift to Missions". Prior to 1972, a fourth corsage was added. Combining the \$1.00, \$5.00, and \$10.00 corsages with a bow of white, gold, and a special color for the year, this corsage sold for \$16.00.

A rainbow colored \$1.00 corsage with a gold star added is given by the Conference Mission Team to all those who are attending School of Missions and/or Annual Meeting for the first time.

A narrow version of the \$1.00 corsage to be purchased for a quarter by children and youth was introduced at School of Christian Mission in 1995. This corsage has MISSION stamped vertically on it and a paper star is attached.

In 1997, Dortha Mae Olsen, MO West Conference President, asked for new designs for the \$5.00, \$10.00, and \$16.00 corsages. Several designs were presented and the following were adopted by the Mission Team:

The \$5.00 corsage would be commercially printed on gold colored ribbon with the quadrennial theme and the dates.

The \$10.00 corsage will be on a looped white ribbon stamped with the words “Special Gift to Missions” and a picture of a missionary from the Missouri West Conference and/or supported by the Conference or a local church within the Conference.

The \$16.00 corsage will be a small silk carnation with a white 1 ¼ inch ribbon on which are stamped the words “Special Gift to Missions” tied together with ¼ inch ribbons of the undesignated giving colors of red, orange yellow, green, and blue.

And so the tradition goes on for women’s shoulders to be pinned with colorful and meaningful ribbons. The designs may change, but the needs around the world continue. God has blessed us and through Corsages for Missions we can be a blessing to others--to bring a smile to a face, to bring a touch of love to a lonely heart, to begin a new friendship, to feed a hungry child, to provide medicine and healing care to the sick, to provide education for children and youth, to provide shelter for those who have no place to call home, to provide preaching and teaching for those who have never heard the message of Jesus, to bring love and peace and justice to a hurting world.

Corsages for Missions are corsages of double love and caring—for the people around the world whose lives are changed by the missions we support and for the people at home who are loved and honored to wear the corsages.

This history was compiled and updated in 1997 by Marcia Berry (Missouri West Conference Corsage for Missions Coordinator 1997) from information given through the years by Sarah Galloway (Arkansas WSCS President, 1946-1950), Eunice Harrington (Nebraska WSCS President, 1950-1952 and South Central Jurisdiction WSCS President, 1952-1960), Mrs. A. R. Marquardt (South Central Jurisdiction WSCS President, 1961-1965), Cora Perryman (Southwest Missouri Conference WSCS President, 1950-1954), Pauline Niles (Missouri West UMW President 1972-1973), Florine Browning (Associate Treasurer, Springfield District, 1974), and Katharyne Frankum (Missouri West Conference Secretary for Financial Interpretation, 1991-1992).

June, 2006 Update by Nelly Peevy, Ribbon Corsage Coordinator, Missouri Conference:

The Missouri East Conference and the Missouri West Conference became one Missouri Conference at our Organizational Meeting on October 5, 2003, and traditions from both Conferences were incorporated into what we now refer to as Ribbon Corsages for Mission. We continue with the practice of the \$1.00 corsages that are hand stamped by the District Coordinators and the professionally stamped ones that are ordered through the District Coordinators from the Conference Coordinator.

Numerous ribbon corsages have been introduced over the past 3 years. We continue to offer one for the Legislative Event, a special one for the Cooperative School of Christian Mission, and Annual Meeting. Others have been introduced to coordinate with a special theme or emphasis. They can be included in a card or letter to a friend or given to say “Thank You” in a special way. Profits from the sale of ribbon corsages continue to go to Mission Giving.