Chapter 9

THE CONGREGATIONAL TRAINING SCHOOL FOR WOMEN

Dorothy C. Bass

Dorothy C. Bass is Assistant Professor of Church History at the Chicago Theological Seminary.

"WHAT SHALL I Do WITH MY LIFE?" a recruiting pamphlet from the Congregational Education Society early in the twentieth century urged its readers to ask themselves. Careers of service in the church, the pamphlet answered, offered exciting opportunities to make a difference in the world and to develop one's own life to the full. "The need is great. Christian leaders are called for at home and abroad. The strongest and best of our young men and women are wanted. No others can fully meet the need. Where and how will you invest your life?"(1)

Congregational women who sought to invest their lives in Christian leadership during the early decades of this century responded to this challenge. They were supported by the Congregational Training School for Women, established by Congregationalists in Chicago in 1909. The school aimed to be "a school for women where a high grade of instruction is offered along the lines of modern thought in religious life and modern methods in social work."(2) According to the school's founders, the churches sorely needed trained laywomen to take on staff positions in congregations and agencies. However, the Congregationalists' dominant image of paid leadership was that of the clergyman. Could the churches be convinced to hire professional women? Those who supported and attended the school hoped to develop new forms of employment for laywomen that would both enrich the churches and provide women with an opportunity to answer the call to Christian service.

WOMEN AND SERVICE

Although women who devoted their lives to Christian service can be found in every era, women have often been excluded from paid leadership and service in the churches. Around the turn of the century, however, a mass movement of American Protestant laywomen developed new models for women's participation in ecclesiastical life. Like the woman suffrage movement of the same period, with which it was closely connected, this movement of churchwomen raised women's expectations about their own ability to make public contributions.

Early in the nineteenth century, women had discovered the rewards and effectiveness of unified moral action in support of missions, education, and social reform. By 1900 they had developed large organizations to further these ends, and hundreds of women held paying positions as Christian workers in bodies such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). The foreign mission field also provided opportunities. In 1900 more than half of all American Protestant missionaries overseas were women, most of them single women supported by denominational women's missions organizations. In addition, more and more institutions of higher education were opening their doors to women. For middle-class women, the period was one in which the excitement of

emerging opportunities and the genuine necessity of many women to support themselves financially created a quest for new careers, inside and outside of the church.

Progressive church leaders were open to receiving the public contributions of this generation of women. It was an era of growth and excitement about the mission of the churches. Advocates of the Social Gospel, which had a strong following among Congregationalists, were aware of the pressing need for a Christian response to the turmoil and injustice that accompanied rapid social change. Christian workers were needed to respond to human crises in rapidly growing cities transformed by industry and immigration. Many city congregations explored new forms of social outreach to their communities. Overseas, the foreign missions movement was at its peak, as confident American Protestants sought to minister to the spiritual and physical needs of a vast but shrinking world. For millions of liberal Protestants, at the turn of the "Christian" Century, the tasks of ministry at home and abroad were exceptionally urgent, alongside the hope that the current ferment would soon usher in the kingdom of God. In these circumstances, women's desire to participate in the work of the churches was hard to rebuff.

As the career expectations of women and the mission of the churches rapidly expanded, the idea of training dedicated laywomen to assist churches in meeting the challenges of the day was appealing. Located in a city transformed by immigration and industry, the Congregational Training School for Women fostered an activist view of the church in the world. Continuing the Congregational commitment to education, it sought to maintain high academic standards and raise the status of women employed by the churches. In the two decades of its existence about 200 women attended, most of them going on into employment in the churches.

The school was never large, but its story contains in microcosm a larger story of women's search for positions of usefulness and respect as professional workers in the churches. It is a story of accomplishment and limitation. It is a story that sheds light on many of the dilemmas faced by church-employed women in all times.

DEACONESS MOVEMENT

The Congregational Training School for Women was incorporated as an independent institution in 1909. Its origins, however, must be traced from earlier sources. Two separate initiatives on the part of women seeking opportunities for employment and education formed the wellspring of the institution.

The first initiative came from a group of now-forgotten women who claimed the ancient church title of "deaconess" as they sought to develop new opportunities for ministry for themselves and other women. In the late nineteenth century a movement to restore the office of deaconess swept through many Protestant denominations. The idea originated in Germany around 1836, and German Lutheran deaconesses arrived in the United States in 1884. American Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Methodists authorized orders of deaconesses within the next few years.

In the Evangelical Synod, a forerunner of the United Church of Christ, an order of deaconesses was founded in 1889 in St. Louis, where hundreds of women eventually trained and lived in consecrated service, usually as nurses. Their historian has called them "pioneer professional women" for the United Church of Christ.(3) These late-nineteenth-century deaconesses and their advocates were proud that deaconesses were trained for their duties; a pious heart, though essential, was not enough for a world in need of service. And so schools to train deaconesses-

early institutions of theological education for women-were founded in a number of denominations.(4)

In 1896 a Miss Dockery, a Congregationalist who had graduated from the Methodists' Chicago Training School for City, Home, and Foreign Missions, called herself a deaconess and went to a small town in Illinois that was in the throes of a miners' strike. Another deaconess soon joined her, and together they opened a home for the sick, poor, and homeless. Once the strike was over, their work expanded to include a Sunday school, weekly prayer meetings, and a Christian Endeavor program. It was a Christian settlement house, providing the kind of service offered by Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago.(5)

The work of these pioneer deaconesses and others doing similar work in a church on the South Side of Chicago soon attracted the interest and support of other Illinois Congregationalists. Support came from the Illinois Home Missionary Society for Miss Dockery's Deaconess Home. A resolution was made in the General Association of Illinois to charter the American Congregational Deaconess Association. When these actions were reported to the triennial meeting of the National Council of Congregational Churches in 1901, the council expressed "profound sympathy with a movement which looks toward the special training of forces long unused, but which are essential to the speedy and fuller development of the Kingdom of God."(6)

Arrangements for training Congregational deaconesses provided the first initiative for what later became the Congregational Training School for Women. In 1901 the American Congregational Deaconess Association obtained housing in the west side neighborhood where the Chicago Theological Seminary was located and persuaded the seminary to offer some courses for prospective deaconesses. A few part-time instructors were also hired. Few records remain of this institution, which was called the Deaconess Training School and then the Chicago Christian Training School for Women, but by 1904 thirty-six women had attended it(7)

As time passed, however, it became clear that Congregational women did not find the office of deaconess attractive. "Perhaps the atmosphere in the United States is unfavorable to such a movement," suggested the disappointed advocates of the deaconess movement at the National Council meeting in 1907. American women-and particularly independent-minded Congregationalists-may have felt "prejudice against the costume as savoring too much of Romanism."(8) Although the deaconess movement in Congregationalism failed, it provided a crucial step toward theological education for women. It was the first root from which the Congregational Training School for Women would grow.

FLORENCE AMANDA FENSHAM

The second initiative providing a point of origin for the Congregational Training School took place in 1900, when a woman sought admission to the regular Bachelor of Divinity program at Chicago Theological Seminary. Florence Amanda Fensham, a missionary on furlough from her position as dean of religious work in the American College for Girls in Constantinople (now Istanbul), was already an accomplished scholar, knowledgeable in the biblical languages and experienced in graduate study after previous furloughs spent at Cornell and Oxford Universities. Thirty-eight years old, she had lost her father in the Civil War and her mother a few years later; women's need to support themselves financially was something she understood firsthand. After

attending a normal school in New York state she taught for a few years. Her academic aspirations were high, and she continued to study, hoping to go to Radcliffe College. A conversion experience and a minister's challenge that she dedicate herself to foreign missions led her to change her plans. She sailed for Turkey in 1883. There she advanced from teacher to associate principal to professor of Old Testament to dean. Intelligent and learned, she asked for admission to Chicago Theological Seminary with no desire to seek ordination. But she did want graduate theological study to satisfy her intellectual appetite.(9)

Florence Fensham's application caused considerable consternation when it was presented to the seminary's board of directors. Was there any legal obstacle to admitting a woman to an institution whose chartered purpose was to train "men" for the Christian ministry? The directors stewed over this question, refusing to seek a legal change in the charter on account of pending litigation about the seminary's tax exemption. They granted Fensham a sizable scholarship and welcomed her to classes, but they avoided the question, would a degree be awarded? Finally, they answered her affirmatively, although without changing either the charter or the institution's de facto policy of neglect on the issue of women in ministry. Fensham was granted the Bachelor of Divinity degree in January 1902 and returned to Constantinople to resume her work.(10) She had made an impression in Chicago. Later one of her professors reported that while at the seminary, she had "raised the tone of the student body distinctly."(11) In autumn of 1904 she was back.

From that time until her death in 1912, Florence Fensham was the key figure in the Chicago Congregationalists' efforts to provide theological education for women. Her first position was as instructor of Bible in the Christian Institute, a school for both men and women that had been founded in 1903 to consolidate the seminary's undergraduate instruction and provide for deaconesses. Three years later she became the assistant dean of the institute. Moreover, she maintained an active presence within the all-male seminary itself: she served as librarian, as secretary of correspondence work, and, when a professor of Old Testament died suddenly, as an instructor.(12) A woman teaching an all-male seminary class on the Bible was uncommon, perhaps even unique. Although it is likely that none of these positions gave her the recognition she deserved, she was a busy and valuable member of the seminary community.

As an activist Protestant laywomen she was ambitious to find new ways of expanding educational and vocational opportunities for women in missions, education, and parish work. The coeducational Christian Institute made only limited contributions toward these goals. Women who enrolled alongside men in the two-year course did find church-related employment on graduation. If they were college graduates, they could cross-register into the seminary's regular courses. Many did so, although no woman again took the B.D. degree at CTS until 1926.(13) Most courses, although taught in seminary buildings by seminary professors, were shared with the institute's undergraduate male students. These men planned to enter ordained ministry in many of the Congregational churches that were too small to afford seminary graduates. In this setting the contrast between men's and women's aspirations and opportunities was striking.

A supportive environment to deal with women's special concerns was needed. Consequently, when the Christian Institute closed in 1909-the victim of financial difficulty and professorial exhaustion-Florence Fensham determined to found an institution dedicated to the theological education of women.

The Congregational Training School for Women was the result of her vision and the culmination of her life's work. She designed it in 1909 and served as its dean until February 15, 1912, when her heart stopped as she ran to catch a train back to the school after a missions meeting with her students. "To it she gave all she was and all she had," declared Graham Taylor, the seminary's prominent professor of sociology and economics; "she herself was its inspiration and initiative, its principal instructor and only administrator, its home-maker and outside representative."(14) Rather than pursuing a Ph.D. degree or ordination-difficult but possible courses of action for a Congregational woman in 1909-this exceptionally accomplished churchwoman worked to further opportunities for laywomen's service. She hoped to make available to Congregational women of the twentieth century a scope of action, a field of learning, and a means of support similar to what she had enjoyed as a teacher and missionary.

THE SCHOOL

Incorporated as an independent institution, although still able to draw on the instructional resources of the Chicago Theological Seminary, the Congregational Training School for Women received from a wealthy physician a fine old mansion that served as its residence and base of operations. Congregational churches, especially their women's organizations, contributed money, food, furnishings, and other necessities. Twenty young women, along with one or two leaders including the dean, lived together while enrolled in the school, sharing meals, conducting vespers every evening, and receiving edifying visits from denominational officials and missionaries on furlough. One young teacher from Kansas, considering enrollment, wrote to a friend that although it might be wise to attend the less expensive Moody Bible Institute, she wanted to go to CTSW because it seemed "more like a home."(15)

Although eminently proper and quite domestic, the school was hardly a quiet enclave. All students were required to do "practical work" in the city. They worked in settlement houses such as Graham Taylor's Chicago Commons, urban congregations, or charitable agencies struggling to respond to the needs of immigrants. Jane Addams and her associates at Hull House, thoroughly immersed in the city's problems, offered an elective course during the first year. In addition, students were required to exercise regularly to enhance their own health and to learn children's games for later use in teaching. Many women held part-time jobs as secretaries or Sunday school teachers to help meet expenses.

Chicago Theological Seminary contributed office and classroom space, as well as numerous educational, religious, and social opportunities. CTSW students with college degrees could enroll in the seminary's regular courses, and seminary professors also taught special courses for CTSW. The women took active part in the extracurricular life of CTS, including worship and many conferences.

Bible study in English formed the core of the CTSW curriculum. A few "supplementary" courses in the traditional theological disciplines of ethics, church history, and apologetics were required, along with the newer disciplines of economics and psychology. Then came a host of practical courses, often taught by part-time instructors who were practitioners in these skills: teaching, story telling, music, physical education, public speaking, business skills, domestic arts, crafts, nursing, and foreign languages (Italian and Polish, for use among immigrants). During the two-year program about two thirds of a student's courses were required, so that a woman could take time to develop the skills she particularly wished to develop.(16) The city, the women's

residential life, and the seminary combined to shape an atmosphere of activism and newness that retained elements of piety and domestic warmth. The initial catalog stated that the school was needed because “changing conditions” necessitated “a new program of work and new activities for the church.” Later catalogs justified the “modern” forms of thought and social work being taught, and numerous visiting lecturers at the school, because they kept everyone up-to-date.

> It is the aim of the school to foster a type of religious life which expresses itself in a broad human sympathy and efficiency; which is vigorous and wholesome; which has many interests and is open to new points of view and methods so that the women who go from the school may understand something of the world’s need, and what are the approved ways today of meeting that need; in short, to nurture an intelligent, consecrated, practical spiritual life in the service of Jesus.(17)

Who attended the school? Students had to be at least twenty-five years old, single, and of high moral and religious character. Once a twice-divorced, thoroughly dishonest woman slipped in, creating quite a pastoral challenge for the compassionate but straight-laced administration. Most of the women were from the Midwest. Many had been teachers, which was seen as good background for church work. They were largely middle-class women, but they seldom had any money and had to work their way through the school. Part-time positions and interest-free loans enabled them to meet the annual expense of $244 a year.(18) Ideally, they were college graduates, but frequently this ideal was not attained. After 1913 a one-year program especially for college graduates became available.

The women at CTSW were eager to do something important with their lives. As a small-town algebra and chemistry teacher wrote, her present career was interesting, but “it just doesn’t quite satisfy me for a life work. . . . Maybe I am foolish, and I am probably not fitted for the work, but I have been interested in the Immigration question ever since we studied it in ‘Endeavor,’ and I wanted to find out if I could not work among those people.”(19)

AFTER GRADUATION

The Congregational Training School’s publicity always claimed, apparently with justification, that there were far more jobs available than there were graduates to fill them. “UNABLE TO MEET THE DEMAND OF THE CHURCHES,” a recruiting advertisement in the denominational magazine blared; “unlimited opportunities await young women of education and pleasing personality who are interested in Christian Service as a life work, and who are willing to prepare themselves for specialized fields of service.”(20)

The possible fields of service were many. Among the first five graduates, one became the minister of a home missions parish in North Dakota, two served as church assistants for religious education in large Midwestern congregations, one worked at a settlement house in Appalachia, and the other joined the staff of the Chicago office of the Congregational Education Society. In the fairly typical class of 1920, there were two church assistants, one director of religious education, one church visitor, and one who stayed on as an administrative secretary at CTSW. That autumn five recent graduates departed for the foreign mission fields, joining four who were already overseas. (Sending graduates overseas had been one of Florence Fensham’s dreams, although fewer were sent than she would have hoped, as the missions movement diminished during and after World War I.) Other positions held by graduates were in the YWCA,

denominational agencies, weekday schools of religion, city church federations, and girls' work.(21)

Marriage to a minister also counted among CTSW alumnae as a distinctive church career. Virtually all graduates took it for granted that they would resign their paying positions on marriage-a convention followed by most educated, middle-class women in the early twentieth century. Although some alumnae records simply indicate that a woman "married," others are listed as if they had a job, "wife of minister," with the church named. School publicity mentioned "minister's wife" as one of the forms of church service in which graduates were active.(22) One amusing testimony to how well the school prepared women for church work came from a graduate's minister husband. He waxed eloquent about how useful his wife's knowledge of scripture and church life was to him. "My personal appreciation of what the Training School did for Mrs. P., who was then Miss M., is far beyond my power to express," he concluded. It is difficult to know whether to lament the absorption of these trained women into their husbands' careers, or to rejoice that they could un-self-consciously celebrate the contributions of ministers' wives.

The most frequent position taken by CTSW graduates was that of "church assistant." Church assistants could carry any number of duties (educational, secretarial, social) and any number of titles (including "pastor's assistant," which the CTSW women found obnoxious). Sometimes the women were well rewarded -in money, respect, and personal satisfaction- but often they were not. Churches characteristically did not prize female leadership. Moreover, as laity in institutions that associated paid leadership with ordination, church assistants confronted many obstacles.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle was the pastor, a figure one of the graduates called "a stone wall in the shape of a man." Some pastors were overbearing, glad to have another pair of hands around the church, but reluctant to share authority. Other pastors were lazy; "I do not think I can truthfully say they need an assistant here but I wish they had a live minister," one woman reported. Sometimes they were old fogies, like the pastor who blocked an assistant's contributions because he did not understand "modern religious education." When a survey asked ministers what qualities they sought in a church assistant, ministers said they wanted a woman who was "good-looking, refined, attractive in appearance, resourceful, tactful, adaptable, whole-some, sympathetic, healthy, patient," and possessed "initiative" and "strong Christian purpose." One Training School student summed it up: "She should be a combination of all the cardinal virtues plus every minor virtue known to the mind of man.(23) All in all, the survey boded ill for the full professional acceptance of women church assistants.

Another major obstacle was the laity; would church members accept the leadership of these women? Some church assistants clearly thrived in their work. When they expressed disgruntlement about the laity, they did so with humor and love. One woman, ebullient about her work in religious education in Wichita, reported shyly but proudly that "it really scares a person when you see them turning to you to know what to do." Others celebrated successful Camp Fire or Christian Endeavor programs, or joked about how hard it was to delegate work to volunteers when it was easier to do it oneself. Many of these women found their work personally rewarding. But that was not the whole story; as one woman put it, "I was terribly lonely in the work and yet I was supremely happy in it."

"The church people evidently expected her to be largely a church secretary and office girl, and used her as such," reported a sympathetic pastor about a CTSW graduate. Fighting this image

was a constant struggle, especially since the school anticipated that a little secretarial work would be included in positions and offered electives in typing, stenography, and filing. At the same time the dean insisted in 1916 that *"the work of a Church Assistant is almost never limited to secretarial or clerical work."*

Graduates found that congregations did diminish the status and effectiveness of church assistants because of prejudice against women. "Women as Church Assistants just at present are still greatly handicapped unless they are fifty years old and although the time is slowly coming when the church will look at it differently, it isn't here yet," one woman reported in 1918. "It is my opinion that at present as far as the relationship with the Church outside the office is concerned, a good tactful man can do it better, but that is not saying it will always be so-*it will not.*"(24)

Careers of church assistants were also hampered by the absence of avenues for promotion and advancement and by low pay. Salary was an ambivalent issue for Christian women who had been trained to diffidence about their financial needs. One of the most forthright women put it this way:

> I am interested in an increase of salary; I feel that I am situated so that it is my duty to look to that side and it helps the cause to demand a reasonable salary. . . . I feel that women assistants ought to be willing to sacrifice in salary for struggling churches but when the pastor is paid a magnificent amount, I feel that the assistant who has had five years of training and also experience ought to be paid an amount that would correspond with the man's salary. But I hope always to be above mere salary.(25)

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

The Congregational Training School for Women is just one institution among many that were built by women, for women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Women's colleges, all-female labor unions, and organizations like the YWCA and the women's International League for Peace and Freedom were major achievements of this era. They not only reflected the fact that women were excluded from male-dominated institutions; they also expressed women's own self-esteem and passion for justice. Within major Protestant denominations, including Congregationalism, women created semi-independent organizations. There, women executives controlled substantial funds raised by laywomen to support missions-usually missions conducted by women on behalf of women and children.(26) For middle-class American women in 1900, training in an all-female school for a predominately female profession was a positive statement of women's vision for themselves and their society.

CTSW was not the only Congregational institution in this period to train laywomen for church professions. Alternative models were provided by the Schauffler College of Religious and Social Work in Cleveland and the Hartford School of Religious Pedagogy.

Schauffler was established in 1886 by a former missionary and his wife as a small training program to prepare Slavic immigrant women to do religious work among their own people. It gradually grew into a two-year training school, not unlike CTSW. It started at a lower academic level and later developed into a small four-year college. In 1954, unaccredited and under-enrolled, the college deeded its resources to the Graduate School of Theology at Oberlin College, which established the Schauffler Division of Christian Education.(27) Still later it became part of Vanderbilt University Divinity School when Oberlin closed its graduate school.

At Hartford it was possible for women to obtain theological education at a higher academic level. In 1889 the trustees of the Hartford Theological Seminary-a three-year graduate institution granting the Bachelor of Divinity degree-voted to admit women to all courses of study. Yet some limitations applied: women could not live in the dormitory or draw on regular financial aid funds. They were expected to have as a goal "religious work other than the pastorate." Few women enrolled in this program, never more than three each year. Larger numbers of women were recruited after a training school, the Bible Normal School (formerly the School for Christian Workers), made a cooperative arrangement with the seminary and moved to its campus in 1902. Rechristened the Hartford School of Religious Pedagogy, it trained a few men and many women, most of whom were not college graduates, for the same sorts of positions CTSW graduates held.(28)

All these schools exemplify the flexibility of Congregational institutions of theological education in the early twentieth century. Less concerned about graduate professional degrees than today's institutions, these schools found ways to serve disadvantaged constituencies and to respond to the needs of their time. Women were not the only beneficiaries of this flexibility. In Chicago, the seminary produced leaders for immigrant communities through foreign institutes. After the 1880s, theological instruction was offered in German, Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian. Even instruction for English-speaking undergraduate men was made flexible through a variety of arrangements, first at the seminary and then, from 1915 to 1934, at the Union Theological College. "We are training workers to meet the conditions, not adjusting men to courses of study that have been inherited from the past," declared CTS president Ozora Stearns Davis in 1919.(29) Although this flexibility in theological education fell short of the Congregational ideal of a learned clergy, it disclosed another ideal of Congregationalists in the age of the Social Gospel: pragmatism.

ESTABLISHING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

To overcome the obstacles they confronted, women took organizational steps to enhance their status. In 1910, Florence Fensham founded the Congregational Woman's League of Church Assistants; in 1915, with support from denominational headquarters, the organization became a national body. Its object was "the promotion of the interests of the Congregational churches, especially in matters relating to the service rendered by salaried women workers," including their recruitment and placement. In 1915 official Congregational statistics counted 125 such workers, and in 1919 about 300. National Councils passed ringing resolutions about the importance of these workers in 1915 and 1921. However, no nationwide policies to enhance their status were adopted, owing to the denomination's decentralized structure.(30)

The leaders of this new church profession for women-inluding the strong and well-educated women who succeeded Fensham as CTSW dean, Agnes M. Taylor and Margaret M. Taylor-were well aware of the churches' reluctance to treat trained women workers as they deserved. These deans kept up a warm and frank correspondence with CTSW alumnae. They traveled widely in denominational circles in quest of recruits, funds, and recognition. The secondary status of women church workers was evident in denominational policy. Denominational scholarship funds were reserved for Bachelor of Divinity students, although Dean Margaret Taylor unsuccessfully protested this policy in 1920.(31)

Despite the limitations of the role of church assistant, these women honestly believed that it

provided the most direct path for women toward greater participation in church leadership. Although ordination was closed to women in almost all denominations, it was possible for Congregational women; Antoinette Brown had blazed this trail in 1853. The ordination of women, however, did not seem to be likely on any large scale.

Biases against women clergy were well known, and few women had followed this path to church service. In 1900 Congregationalism included about forty ordained women in its ministry; in 1919 there were 67 women among 5,695 men. Eighteen women were pastors of "very small" churches, 14 were copastors with their husbands, 14 were religious educators or church assistants, and 21 were employed outside the churches. A 1921 Commission of the National Council reported that "so far as your Commission has knowledge, no scandal or seriously unpleasant incident has grown out of the ordination of women in our denomination." The commission "rejoice[d] in the freedom of our churches in recognizing the prophetic gift in women as well as in men." Even so, this freedom had not led to the entrance of sizable numbers of women into the ministry. The commission thought that this would continue to be the case.(32)

Dean Margaret Taylor agreed in 1926: "It does not seem likely that women would enter the ministry in large numbers even should all theological seminaries remove their restrictions, but they are finding new and interesting use for their talents and energies in the field of religious education." Another leading advocate of women's leadership in the church, Georgia Harkness, a Methodist, concurred in this assessment. These views were also supported by the statistics: in 1926 Congregational women included 74 ministers, 23 licentiates, and 367 church assistants.(33)

A few Training School alumnae were eventually ordained, and the school took pride in their accomplishments. Only one of these has left a record of her difficulties as a woman minister. "The preaching is yet, as has been, so hard for me," Orpha Greep wrote in 1913. "I can hardly describe the feeling I have had in preparing the sermon a good deal of the time. There has been an inner tightening something like the feeling one has when it is hard to get one's breath." This woman left her isolated little parish and became a nurse.(34)

In choosing to de-emphasize ordination and develop a female-identified job as a special path for women into church careers, these women underestimated their denomination's discrimination against women and its bias in favor of the clergy. On the one hand, their strategy represented an accommodation to reality: churches were known to be reluctant to hire women as pastors, and few women were academically qualified for graduate Bachelor of Divinity programs. On the other hand, they were motivated by understandable ideals: their feeling of solidarity with the activist movement of Protestant laywomen, their sense that the times demanded short training programs rather than lengthy academic ones, and their endeavor to create a new professional role.

ABSORPTION OF THE SCHOOL

Professionalism became a strong force in twentieth-century America, both inside and outside the church. In this context, advocates of laywomen in church professions argued for higher educational standards, while ministers increasingly insisted that church assistants needed both collegiate and graduate education. Increasingly, national standards of accreditation for all degree-granting institutions were established. CTSW, which had a policy of preference for education at the college-graduate level, responded to these pressures by devising a Bachelor of

Religious Education program in 1922. Soon thereafter it found a way to secure graduate-level training for all its future students.(35)

In February 1926 the board of directors voted the Congregational Training School for Women out of existence, having arranged for "the setting up of a program for the training of women workers of college-graduate grade" at the Chicago Theological Seminary. Both seminary and CTSW leaders were happy about the merger, although CTSW alumnae expressed some misgivings.(36)

Two factors brought the seminary and CTSW together. First, both institutions relocated to Chicago's South Side, where the University of Chicago stood at the hub of an interdenominational complex of graduate theological schools. Second, there was increasing interest at both these institutions and at CTS in religious education, which might be called the theological growth industry of the 1920s. Drawing on the intellectual work of leaders such as John Dewey and George A. Coe, religious education grew into an impressive and exciting field of study, not only for prospective church assistants, but also for ministerial and doctoral students. The Master's Degree in Religious Education became the goal for most of the seminary's new women students.

At first, excitement about the merger moved women's issues to the fore at the seminary. In 1929 the president announced that a search had begun for a woman faculty member. In 1930 Clara E. Powell, who held a University of Chicago Ph.D. in religious education, was hired. In the same year the seminary trustees and alumni resolved that "in view of the co-educational character of the Seminary, it was time to have both men and women on the Board of Directors." Two laywomen were promptly elected. Special statements in the catalog announced the seminary's commitment to "The Education of Women for Christian Service." Women would work as "church assistants, directors of religious education, instructors in week-day religious schools, missionaries, and ministers." Male students celebrated the ways in which the presence of women improved seminary social life. At about the same time, a few women enrolled in the Bachelor of Divinity program. The first two women, since Florence Fensham, graduated with the B.D. degree in 1926.(37)

However, this promising beginning did not prepare a smooth path for women into church careers. Through the next several decades attention to women's issues was at low tide in churches and seminaries, as well as in American society at large. Congregational women who sought ordination encountered obstacles of many kinds, while religious education professionals saw opportunities shrink as the Depression bit into church budgets. Few theological seminaries, including Chicago, consistently had women on their boards or as regular members of their faculties. Although women students were admitted to more and more theological seminaries, there is little evidence that the issues that created the Congregational Training School for Women in 1909 had been completely resolved.

The Congregational Training School for Women, founded during the first wave of American feminism, represented a creative response within its own time to the issue of women's preparation for church leadership. During the second wave of American feminism, the issue is once again being addressed. In this new context it is not likely that CTSW will provide a model for how women's theological education should be structured. It can, however, provide a model of hope, innovation, and mission that is part of the heritage of women in the United Church of Christ.

Notes

Chapter 9: The Congregational Training School for Women

1. F. M. Sheldon, “What Shall I Do with My Life? A Message on Christian Leadership” (Boston: Congregational Education Society, n.d.), p. 6.

2. The Congregational Training School for Women, Chicago, *Register for 1911-1912,* p. 6. Hereafter issues of this periodical catalog will be refered to as *CTSW Register*.

3. General histories of the nineteenth-century deaconess movement are “The Deaconess Movement in Modern Times,” in The National Council of the Congregational Churches of the United States, *Addresses, Reports, etc. . . . of the Thirteenth Triennial Session (hereafter National Council Minutes*; Boston: Office of the Secretary of the National Council, 1907), pp. 292-308; Jackson W. Carroll, Barbara Hargrove, and Adair T. Lummis

10. Minutes of the Executive Cummittee of the Board of Directors, November 2, and 11 and December 7, 1900, January 4, 1901, and January 3, 1902. Manuscript in the Office of the President, Chicago Theological Seminary.

11. Taylor, op. cit.

12. Arthur Cushman McGiffert Jr., No Ivory Tower: The Story of the Chicago Theological Seminary (Chicago: Chicago Theological Seminary, 1965), pp. 129, 130, 241, 313, and catalog numbers of the Chicago Seminary Quarterly.

13. This fact is disputed; indeed, the best manuscript on the history of the Chicago Theological Seminary (a longer version of McGiffert’s No Ivory Tower, in the Hammond Library) contains conflicting reports about whether the second woman graduated in 1906 or 1926, V:36-37 and IX:104. My research has led me to conclude that a woman was enrolled soon after Fensham, but that she did not graduate.

14. Taylor, op. cit.

15. CTSW Register (1909-10], pp. 7-9; Florence Ripperton to Rose, March 3, 1912, manuscript in the dean’s correspondence, Hammond Library. All other correspondence cited later in this article is in the same collection.

16. CTSW Register.

17. CTSW Register (1911-1912), p. 16.

18. This is the 1909 figure; CTSW Register, 1909-1910, p. 14. Expenses rose as years passed, but the effort to keep costs down was unrelenting, and it appears that financial difficulties did not prevent many women from enrolling. The correspondence of the deans with prospective students shows considerable concern for the students’ financial problems. A 1920 study showed that the Training School’s budget (which consistently ran a deficit) came from these sources: 7.5% student fees, 8.6% endowment, and 50.9% contributions. Minutes of the CTSW Board of Managers, Hammond Library.

19. Florence Ripperton to Rose, March 3, 1912.

20. The Congregationalist, June 17, 1926.

21. CTSW Register (1924-25), pp. 28-36.

22. Ibid. This is a list of all graduates and the jobs each had held since graduation.

23. The survey results are reported in Taylor, "Standards of Preparation," p. 443. The other quotations are from letters to the deans of CTSW, Hammond Library, CTS.

24. Agnes M. Taylor to Miss Beard, April 1, 1916; Harriet E. Gates to Agnes M. Taylor, December 9, 1918.

25. See Mrs. Henry W. Hunter, "The Work of the Church Assistant," Religious Education 12:1 (February 1917):24-30. The quotation is from Ana M. Truax to Agnes M. Taylor, November 9, 1915.

26. There is much historical literature on these organizations. See, for example, Rosemary Skinner Keller, "Lay Women in the Protestant Tradition," in Women and Religion in America, vol. *1,* ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), and Barbara Brown Zikmund and Sally A. Dries, "Women's Work and Woman's Boards," in Zikmund, Hidden Histories, 1:140-53.

27. Grace L. Schauffler, Fields of the Lord: The Story of Schauffler College (Oberlin, OH: Oberlin College, 1957).

28. Curtis Manning Geer, The Hartford Theological Seminary, *1834-* 1934 (Hartford, CT: Case, Lockwood, and Brainard, 1934), pp. 174-75, 195-201; Elwood Street, 'A Living Vision: A Brief Story of The Hartford Seminary Foundation," The Bulletin of the Hartford Seminary Foundation 25 (October 1958): 1-61.

29. McGiffert, op. cit., pp. 169-71; Davis in The Chicago Theological, Seminary Register 9:3 (September 1919]:1.

30. Hunter, op. cit., p. 26; Taylor, "Standards of Preparation," p. 439; National Council, Minutes of the Nineteenth Session (1921), pp. 37-46. In the Presbyterian Church, in contrast, the new office of commissioned church worker was created for similar workers, although its status also left much to be desired by advocates of laywomen in church professions. Elizabeth Howell Verdesi, In But Still Out: Women in the Church (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), offers an interesting analysis of this status, with reference to the power of women and men in the Presbyterian Church.

31. Margaret M. Taylor to F M. Sheldon, September 16, 1920.

32, National Council, Minutes of the Nineteenth Session (1921), pp. 40-41; Brereton and Klein, op. cit., p. 183,

33. Margaret M. Taylor, "The Advance of the Women," The Chicago Theological Seminary Register 17:1 (January 1927):23-24; Georgia Harkness, in Women and Religion in America, vol. 3, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 300.

34. Orpha Greep to Rachel R. Rogers, July 28, 1913.

35. Robert W. Lynn et al., Why the Seminary? An Introduction to the Report of the Auburn History Project (privately distributed, 1979), p. 73; Brereton, op. cit., pp. 192-93; CTSW

Registers.

36. CTSW Register (1925-26), pp. 7-8; CTSW Alumni Association Minutes and Correspondence, June 1928. These records indicate that the alumnae appointed a committee to “prepare a statement to be sent to the Board of Directors and the Faculty of the Seminary of the things essential for women in the curriculum,” but this document, if ever written, cannot now be located.

37. Report of the President to the Board, June 5, 1929; Report of the President to the 25th Triennial Convention, June 4, 1930; Resolutions Committee of the 25th Triennial Convention; all typescripts in the Office of the President, Chicago Theological Seminary. The Chicago Theological Seminary Register, Announcements for 1929-30, p. 22. Gregory Viastos, “Student Life,” The Chicago Theological Seminary Register 19:2 (March 1929):28.