
Leadership Positions: A Declining Opportunity?

by Bertha Dasher

Throughout history, women have contributed to God's cause as fully as they have been allowed. The extent of that contribution has varied with the social and cultural setting of each period of history. Women worked lovingly and faithfully in the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness of Sinai. The devoted concern of the women for their master, Jesus Christ, brought them to his tomb in the early hours of resurrection morning to be the first witnesses of the most vital event of Christian history. In the development of the early Christian church, women shared a part in spreading the Gospel of their risen Christ.

So, too, in the early years of the developing Seventh-day Adventist Church, women played a formative role. Dedicated women of talent and ability felt God's call to service and diligently fulfilled that call.

In order to present graphically the work of women in positions of leadership, I chose two administrative positions and two departments of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. By using data found in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbooks*, I counted the number of women filling leadership roles in these

departments throughout North America, for every five years from 1905 to 1980. An interesting pattern emerges, as can be easily seen in the accompanying graphs.

Many women were church leaders during the early years of the century; we had the highest number in 1915. However, as the church became larger and more prestigious, men began taking over leadership positions. By 1950, there were no women in administrative or departmental leadership in any conference in the North American Division.

There have been small improvements in the last 10 years. In 1975, a woman was the departmental leader for Sabbath school in the Mountain View Conference, Columbia Union, the first woman in that post in any conference in 25 years! But by 1980, a man had taken over her job, and another conference, Chesapeake, had a woman as head of its Sabbath school department. In 1980, the New Jersey, Alabama-Mississippi, and Allegheny West conferences all had women leading their education departments.

The women involved in church administration earlier in this century were able to overcome the obstacles imposed on them and bring their creativity to the work of the church. What might be achieved by women today if they too were placed in denominational positions where their abilities to lead were fully employed?

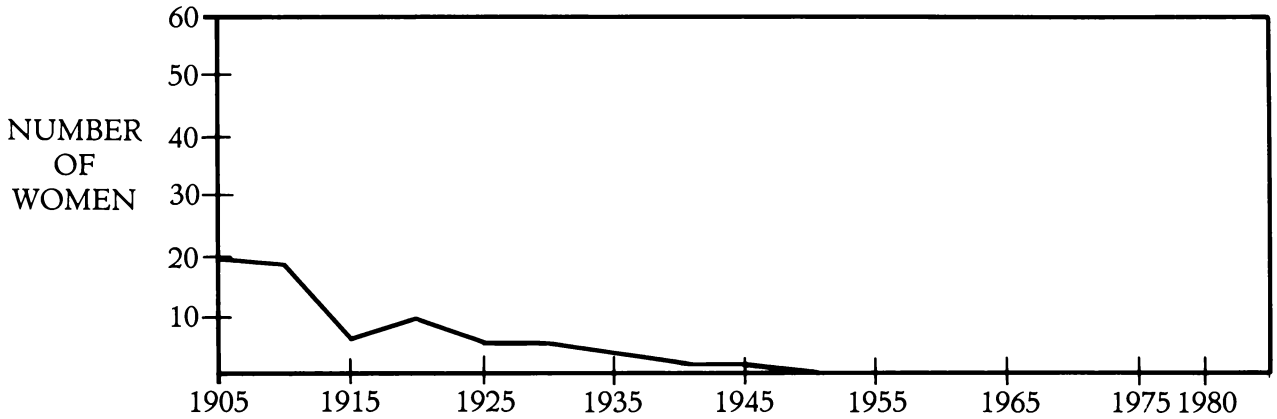
Christ's great commission to his church

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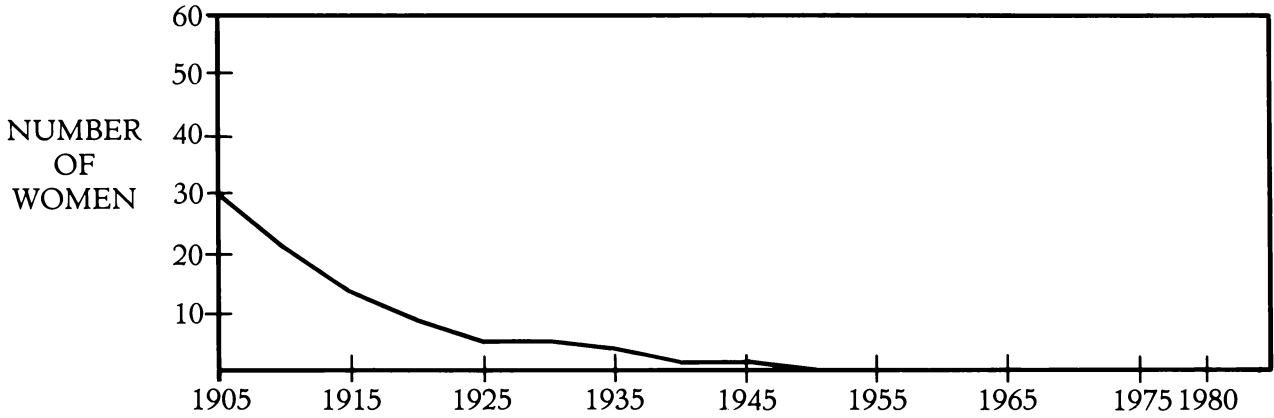
was to win humanity to him. The apostles clearly understood that their task was to carry the message of redemption to all humankind. With that mission in mind, Jesus proclaimed his followers to be the "salt

of the earth" and "the light of the world." The obligation and the power of Christ's mission are thus shared by all Christians, male and female, who form the living body of his church.

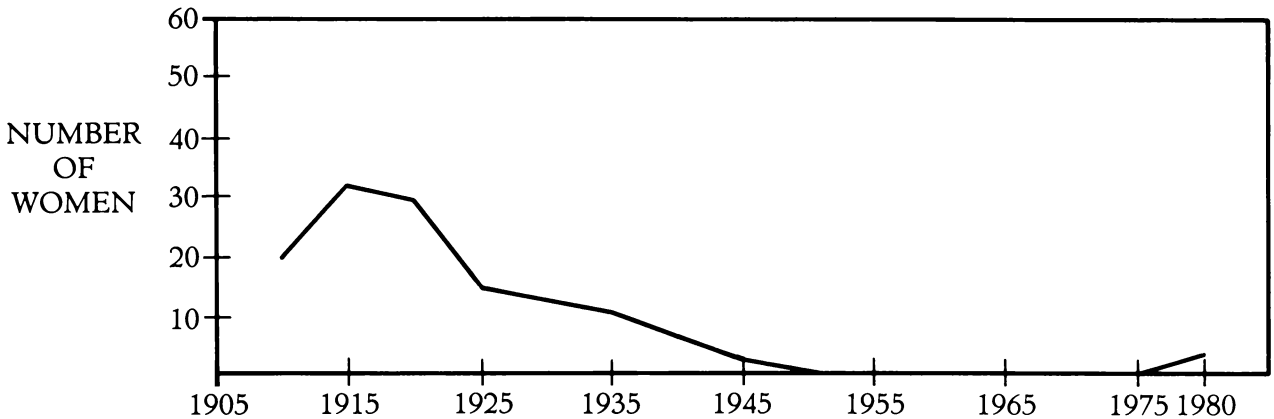
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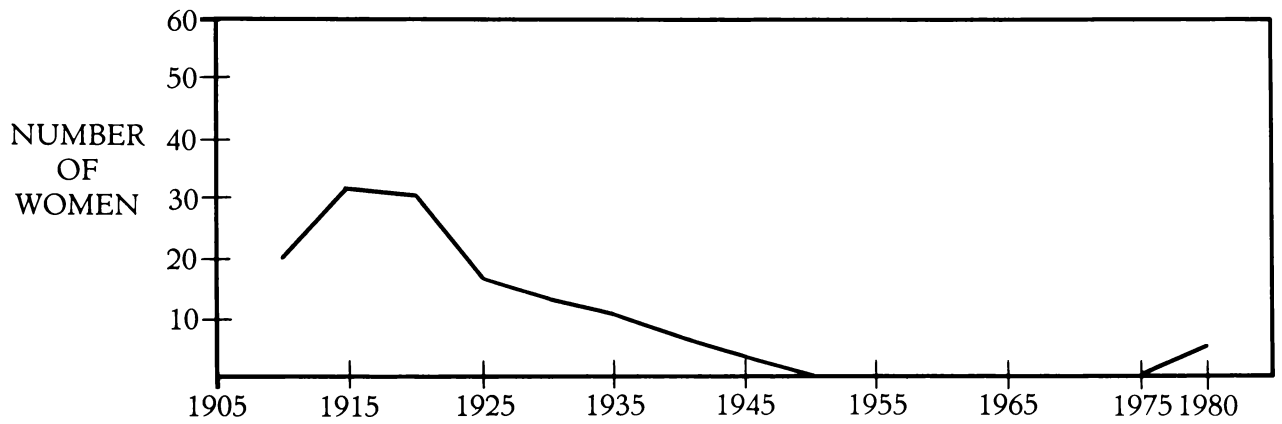
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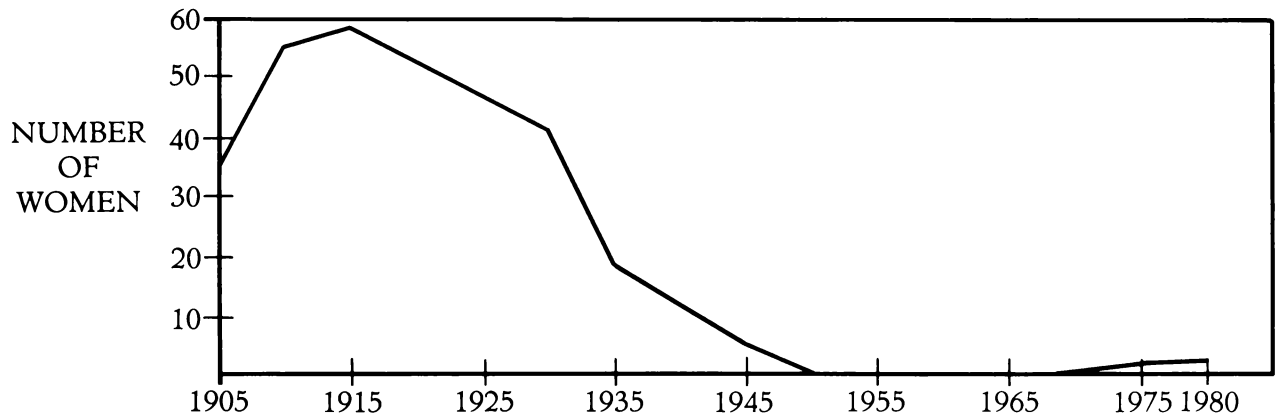
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