

Courageous Past **BOLD FUTURE**

LOIS GLORY NEAL

The Rev. Lois Glory Neal, a Cherokee woman and retired United Methodist elder, has spent over 56 years serving in the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference (OIMC), where 92 Native American churches represent more than 37 tribes in Oklahoma, Kansas and Texas. Says Neal, “I go



wherever I am called to share the Native American story of faith in our great nation and this great church.”

Named the denomination’s first Native American women district superintendent in 1992, Neal today travels as a missionary speaker and Native American ambassador for the General Board of Global Ministries. She delivers engaging stories of the history of Indian people, when the Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole tribes were moved from their homelands of

Georgia, the Carolinas, Tennessee and Alabama, across the Mississippi River, settling in the Oklahoma territories.

She reminds audiences that Christianity and Methodism have a long history among Native Americans in the Midwest: “Our Indian mission of the Methodist Church was organized in 1844, long before Oklahoma became a state in 1907.”

Her career as an Oklahoma City lay minister had already begun when, in 1952, she met Oliver Neal, a Choctaw Methodist youth director/pastor. They married and, in 1954, Oliver persuaded her to leave the security of a salary and a thriving congregation to serve a community of Native Americans in a more modest area of the city. Raising two babies on less income threw the couple into the challenges and opportunities of a missionary-servant lifestyle that formed her powerful faith and enduring calling.

The death of her husband in 1980 broke Neal’s heart, but in coping with the grief, she discerned the call to pastoral ministry. She attended Oklahoma City University, graduating in 1984. At the age of 57, she completed a master’s in divinity program at Saint Paul’s School of Theology, Kansas City, Mo. Since her graduation, she has served the OIMC as a parish pastor, district superintendent, and mission outreach speaker.

Quiz

1. How many United Methodist congregations are in the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference (OIMC)?
2. How many tribes and members are represented in the OIMC?
3. How many clergywomen serve in OIMC?
4. How long has the OIMC been in existence?

Answers

1. In Oklahoma, 88 churches; in Kansas, five; and in the city of Dallas, one.
2. Oklahoma is home to 39 federally and state-recognized tribes. Kansas has four federally-recognized tribes. Approximately 8,300 members are in OIMC; 33 churches are in the Southeast region, serving primarily Choctaw and Chickasaw tribal members; 12 churches are Apache, Caddo, Comanche, Delaware, Kiowa, and Wichita congregations. In the Northeast region, 33 churches serve Cherokee, Creek, Seminole and Yuchi, congregations. The Central region is composed of several urban congregations and includes the tribal peoples of Ponca, Pawnee and Cheyenne/Arapaho.
3. Approximately 32 persons are candidates for ordained ministry or are already ordained, serving local churches. Among them, 18 are women. Approximately 14 laypersons serve as lay missionaries to local churches; five are women. About 98 percent of OIMC clergy and lay missionaries are Native Americans, representing approximately 15 tribes.
4. The first annual conference session of the then, "Indian Mission" was held in 1844 at Riley's Chapel at Park Hill, Oklahoma. Several Choctaw congregations have been around for over 150 years. The first Kiowa Methodist congregation, over 100 years.

For more information, check out *The Story of Methodism in Oklahoma* by J.Y. Bryce of the former East Oklahoma Conference and S. H. Babcock of the former West Oklahoma Conference.

For books and information on clergywomen, visit <http://www.gcsrw.org/newsarchives/2000/newbook.htm> and www.gbhem.org/clergywomen



Produced by The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW), established by The United Methodist Church in 1976 to advocate the full inclusion of women in the life of the denomination and to monitor the Church at all levels for gender bias. The Commission offers training at district, annual conference and churchwide events on organizing and empowering women to find their voices and ministries in the Church; works with bishops, superintendents and other church leaders to understand and eradicate institutional sexism; and educates church laity and clergy on dealing with professional sexual misconduct. For more information and resources, visit www.gcsrw.org, or call (312) 346-4900.