



Odeeokaa Journal of English and Literary Studies

Women Making History: Methodist Women's Fellowship Ibadan District as a Case Study 1968-2024

Opeyemi W. Adedoyin

Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba
Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State.

Abstract

Inquiring into history requires the perspectives of both men and women but the reality has shown that traditional history as we know it places women more on the contributory perspective and not as actual makers of the history themselves. This accounts for the preponderance of men in historical narratives and documentations. Despite the many challenges faced in the use of oral history as a methodology in accessing historical narratives of marginalized groups, in which women fall into, it has been a viable tool in restoring the missing links in getting a complete history. Oral history as both a theory and methodology is used here to restore the overlooked aspect of the history of Women's Fellowship in Methodist church, Ibadan district as it was called then. History has it that aside from the efforts of Mrs C.E. Williams, there were other women who aided the establishment of the fellowship in Ibadan diocese. Existing written documents on these women are scanty. This study intends to make use of phenomenological method using interview as a tool of inquiry.

Keywords: Oral history, women's fellowship, Methodist church, Ibadan District, Marginalized Groups.

Introduction: Women's History

Writing the history of an aspect of an organization calls for specific carefulness so as not to fall into the problem one intends to tackle i.e marginalization of a group or active

groups in the making of that history. Women's history in Africa came late due to documentation challenges of correcting misconceptions and prejudices that had been written about Africa's past by western writers

who claimed Africans had no past to speak of except those written by their colonizersⁱ. To debunk these prejudices, took the efforts of African historians investigating scientifically human development in Africa coupled with the need for the reconstruction of Africa past involving the history of non-literate people which then became a challengeⁱⁱ. Recent work is focused on defining and attributing "gender" in Africa, as well as the ramifications of viewing African life via western gender lenses. These became a challenge in writing African history because these western gender bias made for a masculine-centred view of history which had accepted the male experience as the norm while African women became neglected.

The dearth of historical materials on women covered almost all aspects of living and occupations. It should be noted that African feminist historiography especially between the eighties and nineties focused on the urgency of 'herstory'ⁱⁱⁱ as a strategy for redressing authoritative male narratives and masculine nationalism in canonized traditions of African history. Despite this, authors have come to see the need for an evaluation of African history, and Nigerian history to fill up the gaps that exist in historical narration on the roles, achievement

and challenges women face within various periods of time.

The works of women like, Awe, which reassessed Nigeria's general history in her work, *Nigerian women: a historical perspective*^{iv}, where she points out that African history has been negligent of the role and contributions of women. Using the biographic methodology, she does a detailed compilation of notable women in Nigeria history in the pre-colonial and colonial Nigerian societies. Aside this, there is the work of Karekezi *et al*^v, they did an historical review of the history of women in neurosurgery in the African Continent. A look at the work of Fiona Bowie^{vi}, also looks at the neglected topic of women missionaries and the effect of Christian missionary activity upon women.

Women's History in Christianity

The relative exclusion of women is not peculiar to general history but extends also to all facets of life such that men have been seen to dominate history even that of Christianity. Thus, in a bid to change the usual androcentric Christian history which considers only males as apostles and disciples of Jesus, scholars, offer a reconstruction of Christian origins in which women played a central role as apostles,

prophets, and leaders in a discipleship of equals^{vii}. The church historically is based on a patriarchal system where emphasis is placed on the activities of men alone, sidelining and neglecting anything that has to do with women. This has, over time, configured the thinking and organization of anything about the Church to be entirely patriarchal, neglecting the women and their experiences in functions and roles and recognition.

How then can women be put back into Christian history? Several approaches have been proffered in the reconstruction of women into history, especially biblical history based on the fact that they were originally unrecognised in the settings of things which but does not imply that they were not around or in full participation.

To Fiorenza, “a feminist method of historical reconstruction conceptualizes women’s history not simply as the history of women’s oppression by men but as a story of women’s historical agency and struggles against kyriarchal subordination and oppression^{viii}. This method understands history, not in a positivist sense but as a consciously constructive narrative, as the story of power relations and struggles. Thus, feminist historians having recognised the absence and marginalization of women in kyriocentric texts, have sought to understand the problem

and endeavour to write women back into history and how to capture the memory of women’s historical experience and contribution”^{ix}.

Francis Martin, in his book, *The Feminist Question*, gives a view on the methods that can be used in historical critical investigation, as recovery and reconstruction. According to him, “reconstruction describes the historical work done in order to understand the original context in and for which the text was produced”. He further asserts that “reconstruction has proved valuable in the effort to render the Christian community sensitive to the implications contained in many texts referring to women in the Scriptures”^x. In this sphere, the work of Malone, puts this to action when the contributions of women in the history of Christianity from the first thousand years were brought to light. It sighted the heroic acts of such women like Felicita and Perpetua and their unshaken faith^{xi}.

The New Testament marked the commencement of the “Church”. The exclusion of the contributions of women has also been omitted. According to Doohan, “the New Testament documents witness to the faith of the early Christians and to the Church as a diverse community of believers”^{xii}. Despite this, according to

Barbara quoting Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, says, “we have also overlooked for example the information in the New Testament on the work of women and instead assumed that the Church was a ‘man’s Church’”^{xiii}.

From the New Testament, women played lots of roles, women as apostles, prophets, missionaries and the traditional role of women as care givers. There are various instances of women in the New Testament as missionaries. The story of the Samaritan woman is of note. Her testimony about her encounter with Christ drew many to Christ. Women also gave the first testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Each of the four Gospels mentions the women. In the words of Walter and Liefeld, Luke includes the typical male response, “But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense” (Luke 24:11)^{xiv}, which shows the preconceived notion they had about women.

Having done a general analysis of the perspectives of women in the early church, and considering the fact that the geographical scope of the study is Nigeria, it is expedient to see what scholars have written about women in the history of the Nigerian church. The works of Akintunde^{xv}, Sowunmi^{xvi}, come of note. Akintunde observed that literature relating to religion in Nigeria tells

very little about women’s role within the Christian ministry and even the official history of churches takes very little account of the role played by women within the church^{xvii}. It is important to note that the Nigerian society is highly patriarchal as such the church most of the time mirrors the cultural dictates of society which results in the marginalisation of women despite their preponderance in the church. The church understudy, Methodist church Nigeria, is a mainline church. This study shines the spotlight on biographical information of specific women who contributed to the history of Methodist church in general and the women’s fellowship in specific. This is in abid to establish a women epistemology within Methodist church.

Oral History as a Methodology

Oral history is a critical methodology for the African historian, especially when history is in danger of being lost as memories fade^{xviii}. In cases of the scarcity of written sources^{xix}, oral history becomes a primary resource through which oral interviews are most times the only source of historical data. This is used to tell the stories of minorities, whose stories would ordinarily not have been heard, as is the case with most African Christian women who during those times had received little

or no education and therefore left no paper trail of information about their activities. For instance, most of the female leaders of independent churches were illiterate when they were called into the ministry, thus the need for oral interviews of eyewitnesses, and families of these female leaders to document information about them^{xx}.

Oral history has also been seen as a method that is used to acknowledge the value of women's lives. It is explained as a feminist encounter because it creates new material about women, validates women's experience, enhances communication among women, discovers women's roots, and develops a previously denied sense of continuity^{xxi}. Reinhaz goes further to subdivide oral history into three, topical, biographical, and autobiographical. It is believed by some feminist scholars that injustice can be righted when people tell their stories. At the same time, oral history corrects the biased view of history that had not included her /their voice^{xxii}. In respect to Methodist Church Nigeria, the research uses the biographical method to take write the history of past and present women's fellowship presidents in the district /diocese of Ibadan from ^^^. Information of these women for some of them that are

deceased, were gotten through interaction with children, women worker who worked with them during their lives. As with oral history, verification of certain facts were done through written documents.

Brief History of Methodist Church Nigeria and Methodist Women's Fellowship

Methodist Church Nigeria is a mainline church with roots in Britain. Two forms of Methodism that was introduced to Nigeria were the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary society and the Society of Primitive Methodists. Wesleyan Methodist Missionary society entered to Western Nigeria through Thomas Birch Freeman and other Christian missionaries who arrived in Nigeria in 1842 in Badagry^{xxiii}. The Primitive Methodist Missionary Society which was introduced to the West Africa entered through Eastern Nigeria about twenty-seven years after the Wesleyans arrival in Badagry^{xxiv}. There arose over time a clamour for the unification of the two strands of Methodism in Nigeria. The two forms were finally merged into Methodist Church Nigeria in 1932 although they were still under the British Methodist Conference. Methodist Church Nigeria became autonomous in 1962.

The Methodist Women's Fellowship is a nationally recognized gathering of all married Methodist women in the church. In the early days of Methodist Women's Fellowship in Nigeria, their meetings were held under the Western Nigeria District which comprised all the circuits. According to the minutes of the meeting, a resolution was passed thus: "the Methodist women in Western Nigeria District desire to draw closer to one another and to have a greater unity of purpose in their Christian Fellowship, bible study and in their expression of their Christian life in brighter and better home life Church and social service"^{xxv}. This desire kick started the Methodist Women's Fellowship in all the circuits as the proposition was recommended by the Synod.

There are two accounts on how Methodist Women's Fellowship commenced. The first account states that, in those times when the men were having their meetings (i.e., synod meetings and conferences), their wives would stay in other rooms till they concluded. It was on one occasion that an idea occurred to Mrs C.E. William (Comfort Eugenia), the wife of Reverend E.E. William, who had attended the meetings of the wives of the white missionaries. She suggested that the

meeting should be duplicated in Lagos amongst the wives of indigenous ministers.

The second account states that Mrs C.E. Williams had been invited to the meetings of the white missionaries' wives by Mrs Shrimpton (the Western District Chairman's wife). Notably, on returning from the meeting, she called the wives of the ministers working with her in Lagos to replicate the kind of meeting she had just attended^{xxvi}.

Thus, at this first meeting, there were in attendance Mrs E.J. Dada, Mrs Mary Pearse, Mrs Frances Ajayi-Ajagbe, Mrs J. Ajai-Cole, Mrs Edwin Cole and Mrs A.A. Oluwole. These can be said to be the pioneers of Women's Fellowship in Western Nigeria. Mrs Comfort Eugenia Anike Williams was the first African Methodist Women's Fellowship President while historical information stated that sister Winifred Shovleton as the first President and leader of the Methodist Women's Fellowship in Western District^{xxvii}.

By the second meeting, Mrs C.E Williams suggested that each member should bring two persons for the next meeting to be organised by Mrs Dada. So, from Ereko Church, Miss Paulina Scott and Miss Letticia Randle while Mrs Dada nominated Mammy Shepherd and Mammy Byass from Olowogbowo. From

Yaba Church, Mama Fasoro and Mrs Johnson were nominated, from Ago Ijaiye, Sister B. Taiwo and Sister Beckley was nominated. Mrs Dada also invited the wives of the white missionaries, so Mrs Shrimpton, the Chairman's wife came, Sister C. Mellor from Sagamu came, Sister W. Shovelton, Sister Cuties from Ibadan, Sister Mann. After two to three years, the fellowship began to spread into towns and the villages and was tagged Methodist Women's Fellowship.

The fellowship was initially composed of minister's wives until other women were included for the following reasons: there was need to train rural women in the church and a non-inclusive fellowship would make that impossible as it would limit the scope and reach of the fellowship; thus, including other women into the fellowship increased the circle to ensure continuity and growth in the fellowship. The zeal with which these women worked to make the fellowship work was so infectious that the other women were eager to belong.

The leadership of Mrs C.E. Williams brought tremendous growth the fellowship, part of which was that it contributed money towards the residential training of women as full time circuit workers while the wives and fiancées of ministers were also trained to become better helpers to their husbands. These

trainings began in 1960 at Methodist Layman's Training Centre Sagamu. This study does a biographical exposition on the women who pioneered Methodist women's fellowship. Information on these women were gotten mainly from scanty write-ups about them and entirely dependent on information retrieved through oral interview of members of their family. Some of these women are deceased but their legacy remains impeccable.

Chronicles of Women in Methodist Women's Fellowship, Ibadan District

Methodist Women's Fellowship is a nationally recognized fellowship for all married women in Methodist church. Information about these women were retrieved from church documents and oral interviews. First on the list of women who initiated the women's fellowship is Mama C.E. Williams.

Sister Comfort E. Williams was the founder of Methodist Women Fellowship. Biographical information about her is very brief as little was found documented despite the impactful life she led. The Women's Fellowship movement became a powerful organisation under her tutelage. It impacted the lives of the women greatly, even contributing large sums of money towards

training of women. She died on January 18, 1961. She was replaced by Mrs A.A. Oluwole as the President of the fellowship.

For Ibadan district, the women's fellowship was pioneered by a number of women as well. The wife of then Superintendent of the church, Sister C.O. Salako (she helped in raising funds by staging of plays) the proceeds were used towards the building of the Agbeni Cathedral. Sister D.M.Orekoya, the wife of the first Bishop in Ibadan Diocese, Late Mrs Marian Ishola who was the first woman worker in Ibadan, replaced after her death by Sister Sopitan, Sister E. Yewande Idowu (wife of Patriarch Bolaji Idowu) Sister Sola Adegbola. Mrs. Adewodu, Mrs. C.E.Williams, Mrs. Adewale (alias Mama Labu), Sister J.John. Sister Cecilia Johnson and Sister Williams^{xxviii}.

Sister H.I.D. Awolowo (first secretary of the Women's fellowship in Ibadan, Sister Catherine Alabi and sister Victoria Agosu, sister C.J. Solarin. Later years the Fellowship was handled by series of women in the capacity of women's fellowship presidents. Their biographical information and impact in the fellowship are as follows.

Mrs D.M. Orekoya

Orekoya^{xxix} was born on the 21th of February 1920 at Ootunja Quarters, ikole-Ekiti to

parents, Mr Michael Ogunlade and Mrs Abigail Aina Alabi (nee Kumapayi). In 1928, she started her primary education at St. Paul's Anglican School, Ikole Ekiti. At a point she had to follow her uncle Late Chief Ezekiel Babalola Kumapayi, who had just graduated from St. Andrews College, Oyo whom she later left in 1937 to finish her primary education in Girl's School at Owo in 1939. She started her training in General Hospital, Akure and graduated as a Midwife Grade II in 1941. She later proceeded to General Hospital at Aba to train as a Grade I Midwife. She graduated from there in 1944^{xxx}. She met and married Late Bishop Albert Olusola Orekoya in February of the same year, where he was a priest in Odo-Aiyedun, Ekiti. Not long after Baba got transferred to Tinubu Methodist Church, Lagos. Mama Orekoya joined Baba in Lagos in 1954.

Throughout the movement of her husband, she was always with him, at Ago-Ijaiye, Osogbo, Ayedun, Abeokuta, Sagamu, Ibadan, where he later became the first Bishop. During all these transfers, Mama Orekoya worked among the Women's Fellowship members organizing meetings and Conferences. She also went visiting the members in the various churches from time to time. As the wife of the first Bishop of Ibadan Diocese, she was a major contributor

to the establishment of the Women's Fellowship in Ibadan 1968-1976. She was the president inter Arch Diocesan Women's Fellowship Western Sector between. She through her patience and ability especially as a trained mid-wife, she facilitated the Women's Fellowship to open a maternity centre at Igbo Elerin and even proposed to start a centre for the child care and young ladies in Ibadan township. She was a counselor to many families.

In 1975, sister Orekoya retired as a Nigerian certified Mid-wife. She also authored a book on the history of Methodist women's fellowship in Western sector.

Mrs Abigael Akinnigbagbe

Abigael Oladunni Akinnigbabe nee Olukoya was born in 1920. She married her husband, Timothy Abimbola Akinnigbabe in 1940, who was an Evangelist in Church Missionary Society (CMS) at that time. They both hail from Odo- Ilesha. She was born and raised in Anglican church and received her baptism there. She schooled in St. John primary school and moved to Ilesha to complete her primary education in flying colours being an intelligent student. After obtaining a Standard six, she spent 1 year which qualified her to start working as a teacher. She taught for 3years in Temidire Primary school in

Ilesha. She married her husband in 1940s. They both married in St. John Cathedral in Iloro Ilesha. Mrs Akinnigbagbe was also Head mistress of Methodist Primary school, Agunrodo Ilesha in 1980.

She and her husband later joined Methodist church and as he was transferred from place to place, his wife also went with him. They worked in most Western states such as Oyo Alaafin, Ile Igbo (near Iwo), Ogbmosho, Ibadan, Ifaki. She and her husband worked as the Bishop of Ibadan. Sister Akinnigbagbe and her husband helped establish the church in Odo-Ijesha, where he later retired as a Bishop. She was also the head of the committee for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Women's Fellowship in Western area. She encouraged ecumenical interactions among other women from other churches, *Egbe obirin rere ti ile Ilesha*^{xxxi}.

She is described by those around her as a very hospitable and disciplined woman. She took the affairs of the women a priority and mentored a lot of women during her life. She was very meticulous with the Women's Fellowship funds and was very accountable. She also encouraged ecumenical relations among women in the church and those of other faiths.

Mrs L.M. Makindipe

Mrs Lillian Momisola Makindipe was born to the families of Prince Joshua Akindeko and Princess Chief Felicia Olaferede Akindeko. Her father was a London-trained tailor (as those trained in Lagos was called then), he later became a merchant and a farmer. Her mother was into agriculture and merchandise. Both parents were natives to Atosin, a very small town in Idanre Kingdom, Ondo State. Mrs momisola and her husband, Rev. C Olusoji Makindipe, a Methodist minister got married in 1962 at Methodist Church Nigeria, Owo, after their traditional marriage in 1958^{xxxii}.

Mrs momisola was a brilliant scholar. She attended primary school in Idanre and obtained the Grade 3 Teacher's certificate. After training, she taught in both government and private schools one of which is the famous Children's home school in Molete Ibadan, Oyo state.

She went into various ventures such as tailoring, farming, poultry, as well as also an athlete, dramatist and seller of goods around the neighbouring towns. She also had a flare for acting during her youth, she once belong to the Herbert Ogunde theatre troupe of Nigeria.

As a minister's wife, she had deep interest in youth development and she was instrumental to the formation of the Ladies and Girls Fellowship in Methodist Church Nigeria. She was also the President of the Women's Fellowship and Minister's Wives' Association at every local church where her husband was posted. These included, churches in Owo, Sapele, Igbobini area, the Methodist Church of the Trinity, Tinubu, Lagos; the old Diocese and Archdiocese of Iléshà, comprising today's Archdioceses of Iléshà, Igbobini and Ifaki; the old Diocese of Ibadan, comprising today's Archdioceses of Ibadan and part of RIYE (Ìjẹ̀bù, Remo & Remo-Central). In the church's present structure, these make up the following dioceses, they are the dioceses of Ibadan, Elekuro, Agodi, Ogbomoso, Ijebu, Omuo, Osogbo, Owo, Oyo, Remo, Remo-Central, Ilesa, Ijesa-North, Kwara, Okun, Ifaki, Imesi-Ile, Ado-Ekiti, Akure, Idanre, Aayedun, and Edo-Delta. She was also the President of the Inter-Archdiocesan Women's Fellowship of the then Western and Northern areas of the Methodist Women's Fellowship. She was the Women's fellowship President for the diocese of Ibadan in 1977-1985.

As a church and community leader, she played her part in the creation of the new Diocese of Idanre in 2023. And, being a

minister's wife gave her the rare opportunity of traversing across the nation with her husband. She was one of the very few Methodist women who attended the World Methodist Conference in Seoul, South Korea in 1990s.

She was translated to the community of ecclesia triumphant in the year 2023 at the age of 85years.

Mrs Dorcas Akinbo

Sister Dorcas Alaba Akinbo was born on May 3, 1932 to the family of Pa Emmanuel Kehinde Akinleye (Baba Petesi) and Madam Juliana Tejumade Akinleye (Nee Akinwunmi), all of Igan-Okoto, Yewa North Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria¹.

In her days, education for girl children was not given priority but sister Akinbo was finally enrolled in 'infant school' in 1937 which was orchestrated by her mother so that she could be literate and study the Holy Bible. Despite her ill health due to a leg disease, she was already proficient in reading and writing the Yoruba language within two years of formal education. She was engaged

in church activities at the Methodist Church, Igan-Okoto.

She got engaged to Late Rt.Revd Ayinla Olutayo Akinbo in 1955 while he was a minister in-training at the Methodist Theological Institute in Sagamu (MTI) and subsequently got married in 1958 at Ereko Methodist Church. After their wedding, Revd Akinbo continued his education at Immanuel College of Theology (ICT), Ibadan, while sister Dorcas was sent to Methodist Theological Institute (MTI), fondly called 'ogba Mellor', at that time, as part of the a cohort of ministers-in-training wives, where she received training in leadership and housekeeping. She taught the minister's wives under her in the rudiments of manse caring for spouses and children as priority. She was known as a role model mother and she impacted the lives of youths as a Bishop wife in Igbobini diocese and old Ibadan diocese as well.

She was also known for her proactivity as she displayed these during her leadership roles as Women's Fellowship President and in meetings and Conferences.

¹ Interview respondent, Mrs Olutoyin Makinde Nee Akinbo, Daughter of Mrs Akinbo, aged 68 years, interviewed on the 3 September, 2024.

Sister Akinbo's penchant for memorizing bible passages was imbibed from her childhood, when her parents were strict Christians would ask her every Sunday evening to recount the events that took place in the church service, from the hymns sung, to the sermon topic and the details of scriptures read. Infact, the *oriki* of the family is *omo alago ajilu, omo igbagbo ayo okan*. She was a very dedicated Christian as a choir member and intercessor. She started attending Women's Fellowship conferences with her mother at a very young age and she followed her mother to various towns where she was assigned various responsibilities such as Bible reading announcement of hymns.

Mrs Akinbo went with her husband wherever he was transferred from place to place. She took on the leadership position role as the Women's Fellowship President of the Ereko Methodist Church, Ereko Lagos, assisting the circuit Women's Fellowship President, she was the Women's Fellowship President of the Local assembly in Obun Eko Methodist church, the Women's Fellowship President of the Local assembly at Hoares Methodist church, Yaba, Lagos. Women's fellowship President Methodist Church Sabon Geri, Kano, Methodist Church, Oshodi, Freeman Methodist Church, Ogbe, Abeokuta,

Norcross Methodist Church, Oturpo, Benue State, Methodist Church Jos, Methodist Church Agoijaye, Lagos, Methodist Church Okitipupa Diocese, Ondo state as the Diocesan Women's Fellowship, Methodist church Ibadan Diocese, as the Diocesan President and Methodist Church Egba-Yewa Diocese, as the Diocesan President as well. Her hospitality was recounted as second to none as during those days and she instilled in the young ministers wives the courage and boldness needed to be future women leaders. She mentored the youths in the church as her own children and it was almost impossible to recognise her biological children from her spiritual children.

During her tenure as the Women's fellowship President in Ibadan, she ensured that the landed property in Agbowo area of Ibadan was not encroached upon during her tenure in 1986-1993.

She experience of the civil war impacted her life positively seeing how she and her family were miraculously delivered from chaos that could have consumed her and her husband's life while he was posted as a minister in Kano. She is loved and remembered by a host of women who relish her impactful administration in the circuits she headed.

Mrs Matilda Ladigbolu

Mrs Matilda Afolake Ladigbolu was born in Eyinwa (Odogbolu local government) Ogun state in 1937. She was trained as a Nurse/Midwife at the Wesley Guild Hospital, Ikole-Ekiti, Methodist Hospital Annex. She was the Best Graduating student in her year of graduation. This qualified her for the compulsory One Year Missionary Nursing assignment of Wesley Guild Hospital, and later posted to Methodist Health Centre, Kaiaama in Borgu Circuit. She married Reverend Ladigbolu in the year 1964.

She served in the Mission Field as Nurse/Midwife, Translator and Evangelist for over three years and later served as Senior Nursing Officer in some private hospitals including Alafia Hospital, Ibadan. She accompanied her husband to the United States of America where she obtained further advanced Nursing training before returning to Nigeria to serve for many years as Matron at Abiye Maternity Hospital, Sagamu. She took voluntary retirement from nursing to fully support her husband in episcopal responsibilities^{xxxiii}.

Mrs Ladigbolu was privileged to serve the Methodist Church Nigeria through the years as Women's fellowship President in Diocese of Ifaki, Ibadan and Ilesa. She also served in

the capacity of archdiocesan President and also inter Archdiocesan President of the Methodist Women's fellowship. She pioneered the first ever Pillars and Achievers award of Women's Fellowship, which is an award programme initiated to give recognition to women in the church who have contributed notably in all the Methodist dioceses, circuits and local churches.

She was the Methodist women's fellowship president for diocese of Ibadan in 1993-1998. During her tenure she achieved a lot of landmark achievements which helped to set the diocese of Ibadan for greatness. During her tenure, the Women's fellowship built series of shops in Aleshinloye market which was rented out to traders. They also acquired 2 plots of land in Kukumada in 1997/1998. The diocese has other investments such as the land in Agbowo, an area in Ibadan which according to the 2007 report was given to interested person for the purpose of farming at a stipulated fee. During the time when the mission schools were being taken over by the government, the church clamoured for the reversal of this policy. In response to this, the government released the United Missionary College (UMC) which was the alliance of the Methodist and Anglican Church. The efforts of the Women's Fellowship provided encouragement to take over the college in

1995. At the takeover, the problem of infrastructural facilities were brought up as part of the rudiments for take over. The Women's Fellowship took up the challenge of providing those facilities ahead of the diocese and made it easy to sit down to negotiate a sharing formula of 50/50 between Methodist church and Anglican church^{xxxiv}. The women's fellowship provided an over-head tank for water supply in the school. The Women's Fellowship initiated the construction of hostels around Agbowo area of Ibadan to service University. The diocese of Ibadan encouraged the ladies and girls fellowship in Self Employment Training Scheme (SETS) in 1993-1999. SETS was a scheme aimed at self-empowering girls and ladies with skills. Ladies and girls were gathered from all the circuits and taught skills like soap making, *adire* making, tie and dye making.

She was also one of the initiators of the Methodist Girls Fellowship. She worked tirelessly and travelled far and wide for the completion of the Women's Fellowship ASERO project located in Abeokuta. As a kind-hearted and caring person, she joined her husband in founding the New Hope Global Associates, (a charitable organization devoted to serving the orphans, widows,

vulnerable children, and Persons Living with HIV/AIDS.

Mrs Ogunyemi was the president of Methodist women's fellowship for the diocese of Ibadan in 1997-2006.

Mrs Felicia Iyabo Stephen

Mrs F.I.Stehen was born on 17th September 1952 to parents, Archbishop Emmanuel Adedoyin Fowode and Mrs Frederica Ibidapo Fowode. She is from Ijebu-Igbo. She had her primary education at Ereko Methodist School Lagos and UMC Demonstration school Ibadan. She had her secondary education in St Anne's school Ibadan from 1965-1969. After her secondary school education, because of her interest in Accountancy, she had her first tint of the profession while working in the then newly created Chief Accountant Department at the Standard Bank of West Africa now known as First bank of Nigeria PLC (February 1970 to September 1974). While working in the bank, she developed so much interest in banking which led her to pursue both her accountancy and banking career in United Kingdom. She studied both at St. John's College of Further Education Manchester, University of Manchester and Salford College of Technology now known as Salford University, Salford. Upon completion of

studies in U.K in 1978, she came back to Nigeria and had her National Youth Service Corps at Nigeria Airways Ltd in Accounts department. As a youth she was a member of the Trinity Methodist Church, Nigeria and served as the assistant secretary of Trinity Methodist Youth Club of Methodist Church Nigeria, Tinubu 1969-1972^{xxxv}.

She got married to The Revd. Michael Kehinde Stephen on August 4th 1979, who was then studying at Emory University Atlanta USA. She later studied Computer programming and operations at Control data Institute in Atlanta. She left the institute in 1981.

Mrs Stephen returned to Nigeria to join her husband at Methodist Theological Institute (MTI) Sagamu. While in Sagamu, she worked briefly as a commercial subject teacher at Remo Secondary School and later as Finance and Administrative Manager for 10 years at Ola-Oluwa Clinic Sagamu. She also taught Accounts, management of church Finances and church Administration to sub Pastors and ministerial students for a decade (1981-1991).

As her husband was posted from location to location, she moved with him. Thus when her husband became the Bishop of Remo, she became the President of Women's

Fellowship Diocese of Remo, January 1992-December 1996. She impacted the fellowship by initiating skill acquisition programmes and empowerment for young ladies and women in the diocese of Remo.

Mrs Stephen has given several lectures, seminars and workshops to Minster and Minsiter's wives as well as Bishops' wives since 1991. She was the member of Methodist Church Nigeria Conference Women's Work Board and treasurer from 1997-2001; Chairperson Conference Women's Work Board in 2001 to Dec 2010. She was sent as a delegate to the 2006 World Methodist Conference in South Korea. She became the President of the Methodist women's fellowship, Diocese of Ibadan in December 2006-2018^{xxxvi}. Then the president of the Methodist Women's Fellowship, Archdiocese of Ibadan in December 2006-2018. She was sent as a delegate in 2016 to the World Methodist Conference in Houston, Texas. During the time she was the president of the Women's fellowship in Diocese of Ibadan ((2006-2019), she encouraged ecumenical relations between the women and other women of other faiths. She was a distinguished member of the Women wing of Christian association of Nigeria (WOWICAN) in the South West Zone of Nigeria. She also encouraged various skills

acquisition programs for young ladies in the entire Archdiocese of Ibadan with the help of the women's work department at the headquarters. As a minister's daughter and wife, she has been able to motivate a lot of persons in and outside the church and her.

Mrs Taiwo Adetokunbo Odejayi

Mrs Adetokunbo Odejayi was born in 1963 in Kenema, Sierra Leone to the families of Mr and Mrs Bada who hailed from Odosinusi quarters, Ago-iwoye Ijebu North Local Government area of Ogun State^{xxxvii}. Mrs Tokunbo grew up in Igbobi-Fadeyi/Mushin area of Lagos. She attended primary school in Mushin public school, Mushin Lagos, and proceeded to Ago-Iwoye secondary school, Ijebu and Marywood Grammar school Ebute-Metta for completion of her secondary education in 1981. She proceeded to Lagos State college of Education, Ijanikin Lagos where she read history and religious studies for her NCE while she obtained a Bachelor Degree and Post Graduate Studies at the University of Ibadan with specialization in Social Work/Christian Religious Studies and Social Welfare.

She met and married her husband on the 25th of April 1992 in Methodist church Nigeria, Ikorodu road, Lagos. Her scholastic side was not left to waste as she has written and

presented papers especially in the newly inducted Bishops' wives and Methodist Ministers' wives retreat. She taught in several schools among which Ikenne Community High School, Ikenne-Remo in Ogun State. She retired from the Lagos State teaching service commission.

As a born Methodist, she passed through all the stages in the church. She was taught how to sing hymns like " *Fe enikeji re, ase Oluwa ni*". " *Eni kan mbe to feran wa*" " *Jesu feran omode*" among others as a Sunday school girl of Ereko circuit in Methodist Church Nigeria. As a youth: was a member of the Ladies collectors under the leadership of Lady R. A. Adewuyi, Christian Youth Association (CYA), Girls brigade and Ladies league. She was the pioneering President of the Ladies and Girls Fellowship (1987) in her church. A pioneer member of the Methodist Evangelical Movement (1986) of her church under the tutelage of Late Bro Femi Osundahunsi of Wesley Cathedral, Olowogbowo, Lagos.

She completed my training as a lay preacher in April 1992 at Hoares Memorial Methodist Church, Sabo Yaba, Lagos but was accredited in 1995 at Methodist Church Nigeria, Agbowo, Sagamu.

Mrs Tokunbo is very dutiful as a wife. She accompanied her husband to all the stations that her husband was transferred to. They have been transferred to Ikorodu (December 2005 – December 2015); Elekuro (December 2015 – December 2018); Ibadan Diocese and Archdiocese of Ibadan December 2018 - Nov. 2024). The Women's Fellowship purchased a Toyota Hiace 18 seater bus for Diocese of Ikorodu during her tenure.

As the Women's fellowship President of diocese of Ibadan, she impacted the women, church and the society through the implementation of various Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives to the schools. There have also been various scholarship grants to students on various levels of education in the diocese and archdiocese of Ibadan. She is also focused at ensuring women in various ways. She has initiated various empowerment programmes for women in the diocese in soap making, hat making and pastries. There has also been organized various workshops on health, professional trainings.

Conclusions and Recommendation

The history of the women who have been instrumental in the establishment of Methodist Women's fellowship in all the diocese are fast getting obscured as information about them are getting ambiguous with the passing on of eye witnesses. Getting information about these women proves a daunting task for researchers in history. This study has thus contributed to putting in print the history of past women presidents in Methodist women's fellowship in Ibadan Diocese.

This research recommends that the church takes it upon herself to write the history (biography and contributions) of these women in published books to be kept for posterity. This should be done by each diocese to the local churches of women who have contributed immensely to the church.

ⁱ Hugh Trevor-Roper a British historian in 1965 said "Perhaps, in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none, or very

little: there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa". Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-40420910>

accessed 27/07/2024. See also Ihediwa Nkemjika Chimee, African Historiography and the Challenges of European Periodization: A Historical Comment, on <https://trafo.hypotheses.org/11518> accessed on the 27/07/2024.

ⁱⁱ B. Awe. 1991. Writing Women into History: The Nigerian Experience. K. Offen, R.R.Pierson, J. Rendall (eds.) Writing Women's History: International Perspective. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 211

ⁱⁱⁱ Herstory is a term for history written from a feminist perspective and emphasizing the role of women or told from a woman's point of view retrieved from <https://brainly.ph/question/18119132#:~:text=herstory%20%2D%20Is%20a%20term%20for,all%20aspect%20of%20human%20society> accessed on 30/07/2024.

^{iv} B. Awe. 2001. *Nigerian Women: A Historical Perspective*. Ibadan: Bookcraft Ltd. See also B.Awe. 2016. *Nigerian Pioneers and Icons*. Ibadan: Childsplay Books Limited.

^v Claire Karekezi, Nqobile Thango, Salamat Ahuoiza Aliu-Ibrahim, Hajar Bechri, Esperance Maman You Broalet, Mouna Bougrine, Jebet Beverly Cheserem, Maguette Mbaye, Zarina Ali Shabhay, Nabila Tighilt, Souad Bakhti Najia El Abbadi, in "History of African Women in Neurosurgery". *Neurosurg Focus* 50(3) March 2021. See also Kuiper, E. (2022). A herstory of economics. John Wiley & Sons.

^{vi} Ardener, S., Bowie, F., & Kirkwood, D. (Eds.). (2021). *Women and missions: Past and present: Anthropological and historical perceptions*. Routledge.

^{vii} L.y M. Russell & J. Shannon Clarkson. 1996. *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*. Great Britain: Westminster John Knox Press.

^{viii} Kyriarchy is a term coined by Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, a feminist theologian from kyrios, which means 'master' and archein which means 'to rule'. Kyriarchy describes a system of interlocking structures of dominion. See E. S. Fiorenza 1992. *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. 8.

^{ix} E.S. Fiorenza. 2001. *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*. New York: Orbis Books.144.

^x F. Martins. 1994. *The Feminist Question: Feminist Theology in the Light of Christian Tradition*. 85-86.

^{xi} M.T. Malone. 2000. *Women and Christianity. The First Thousand Years*. Canada: Novalis. See also D.F. Sawyer. 1996. *Women and Religion in the First Christian Centuries*. London: Routledge.

^{xii} H. Doohan. 1989. *Paul's Vision of the Church*. Delaware: Michael Glazier Inc. 39.

^{xiii} B.J. MacHaffe. 1986. *Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 23.

^{xiv} W. L. Liefeld. 1987, *Women and evangelism in the early Church*. *Missiology: An International Review*. Vol. XV/3. 292.

^{xv} D.O. Akintunde. 2004. *The Ministry of Women in Lucan Narratives: A Model for Aladura Churches in Nigeria*. Nigeria: The African Association for the Study of Religion.

^{xvi} M.A. Sowunmi. 2009. *Women's Ordination as Priests: a Biblical Challenge and Imperative*. Nigeria: Book Builders-Edition Africa.

^{xvii} D.O. Akintunde. 2004. *The Ministry of Women in Lucan Narratives: A Model for Aladura Churches in Nigeria*. Nigeria: The African Association for the Study of Religion

^{xviii} M. M. Sigg. 2019. *Honouring the Christian Lioness of Africa: Documenting the Legacy of Women in the History of African Christianity*. S.A. Fatokun, J.K.Ayantayo, O.O.Familusi, *et al* (eds.)

African Christianity in Local and Global Contexts: A Festschrift in Honour of Rev. Professor Isaac Deji Ayegboyin@70. Religious Studies series, Vol.7.

Nigeria: Baptist Press. 86

^{xix} As is the case of Methodist history and women's history. The researcher had to depend on oral interviews and few church documents for specific detailed information on women's work Department. See M.M. Sigg. "Oral History as an Essential Tool for the Historian of African Christianity: The Case of the Dictionary of African Christian Biography", in *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies* XLVII/1&2 (June & December 2015), 75-76.

^{xx} E. Isichei. 1995. *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present*. London: SPCK.

^{xxi} S.Reinhaz. 1992. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York: Oxford University Press. 126.

^{xxii} S.Reinhaz. 1992. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. 135.

^{xxiii} M.M. Familusi. 1992. *Methodism in Nigeria (1842-1992)*. Ibadan: NPS Educational Publishers Limited.

^{xxiv} J. Pritchard. 2013. *Methodism and their Missionary Societies 1760-1900*. U.S.A: Ashgate Publishing Company. B 192.

^{xxv} National Archives Ibadan (NAI), Nigeria Records Office ECC 27/57/8205 Minutes of the Women's Work committee of the Western Nigeria District Synod of 1935.

^{xxvi} E.A. Makinde. *Women as Teachers and Character Moulders: A Handbook commemorating the 8th Anniversary of Women's Fellowship in Methodist Church Nigeria 1932-2012*. Church Document.

^{xxvii} National Archives Ibadan (NAI), Nigeria Records Office ECC 27/57/8205 Minutes of the Women's Work committee of the Western Nigeria District Synod of 1939. It was stated on the occasion of the retirement of Mrs Shovelton's husband from field (after serving the District for 10 years) commended "as having seconded her husband", and specially remembered as the first President and leader of Methodist Women's Fellowship.

^{xxviii} E.A. Makinde. *Women as Teachers and Character Moulders: A Handbook commemorating the 8th Anniversary of Women's Fellowship in Methodist Church Nigeria 1932-2012*

^{xxix} Church document, Methodist Church Nigeria,

Inter-archdiocesan Women Fellowship Conference 70th Anniversary Celebration, pillars and Achievers Award Ceremony, 17th August, 2002.

^{xxx} Church document, Methodist Church Nigeria, Inter-archdiocesan Women Fellowship Conference 70th Anniversary Celebration, pillars and Achievers Award Ceremony, 17th August, 2002.

^{xxxi} Interview Respondent, Reverend Ekundayo, 77years, Woman worker during the tenure of Mrs Akinigbagbe. Interviewed 06/09/2024.

^{xxxii} Interview Respondent, Very Rev. Sola Makindipe, Son of Mrs Makindipe (one time Women's fellowship President, diocese of Ibadan), interviewed 17/08/2024

^{xxxiii} Interview Respondent, Mrs M. Ladigbolu, aged 80years, one time Women's Fellowship President, diocese of Ibadan, interviewed on the 26/09/2024

^{xxxiv} Interview Respondent, Mrs M. Ladigbolu, aged 80years

^{xxxv} Interview respondent, Stephen Felicia. Aged 72years, one time Women's Fellowship President, Diocese of Ibadan interviewed on 09/08/2024.

^{xxxvi} Interview respondent, Stephen Felicia I. 72years.

^{xxxvii} Interview Respondent, Mrs Tokunbo Odejai, aged 60years, Present Women's Fellowship President, diocese of Ibadan. Interviewed on 2/09/2024.