

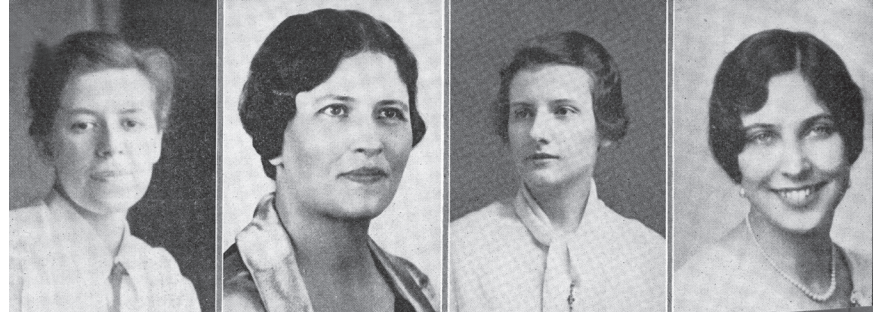


A BRIEF  
HISTORY OF THE  
**UNITED  
THANK  
OFFERING**





## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNITED THANK OFFERING



**T**he history of the United Thank Offering (UTO) reflects the role and place of women in the governance and outreach of The Episcopal Church in the 19th and 20th centuries. Its history reveals that women were a prime source of missionary support and funding that undergirded the general church budget, while at the same time being consistently excluded from positions of authority and decision-making in the broader Church. Reviewing this history gives insights into the emotional, financial, and organizational challenges that the United Thank Offering faces now in the 21st century.

Throughout the 19th century, Episcopal women organized, promoted, and funded much of the missionary outreach of The Episcopal Church. The voluntary affiliation of Episcopal women in the work of The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society (DFMS) was often the single most important source of support for the official Missionary Society of the Church. Women were also well represented as missionaries in the domestic and foreign missions of The Episcopal Church. With the support of the Women's Auxiliary to The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, more women than men eventually served The Episcopal Church as missionaries. For example, two of the first foreign missionaries sent to Greece were women: Frances Marion Hill taught young women in Greece from 1830 to 1884, and Emma Willard founded the Troy Society for the Advancement of Female Education in that country.

At the founding of The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society by the General Convention in 1821 and throughout the 19th century and early 20th century, women were excluded from serving on the Board of the Missionary Society or any of its committees. This was consistent with the wider exclusion of women in the governance of The Episcopal Church, as women were not seated as deputies to General Convention until 1970. Episcopal women, however, were key to the local, national, and worldwide outreach of the Church through parish and diocesan women's "auxiliary bodies" that supported the official and exclusively male committees, commissions, agencies and boards. Recognizing the increasingly important role of women in the work of The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, Bishop Horatio Potter of New York suggested in 1850 that the women of the Church become more organized to support the work of the Church's missions.





In response the General Convention of 1871 created the Women's Auxiliary to the Board of Missions of The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, bringing together many of the parish and diocesan women's auxiliaries. Mary Abbott Emery served from 1872 to 1876 as the first National Secretary. She asked every rector in The Episcopal Church to appoint a secretary who would correspond with the National Secretary about the work of the women in each parish, perhaps creating the first centralized database. During Emery's short tenure, more than 350 local secretaries were appointed and women's groups formed in nine dioceses. Julia Chester Emery then succeeded her older sister, Mary, as National Secretary. Eventually two additional Emery sisters, Susan Lavinia and Margaret Theresa, joined Mary and Julia as staff of the Auxiliary. No other family has contributed more to the Women's Auxiliary and the missionary work of The Episcopal Church than the Emerys.



We would be remiss if we did not also remember Mrs. Ida Soule, for whom the trust fund for pensions for women workers is named. She worked behind the scenes for many years to make sure that the offering increased and did not flounder.

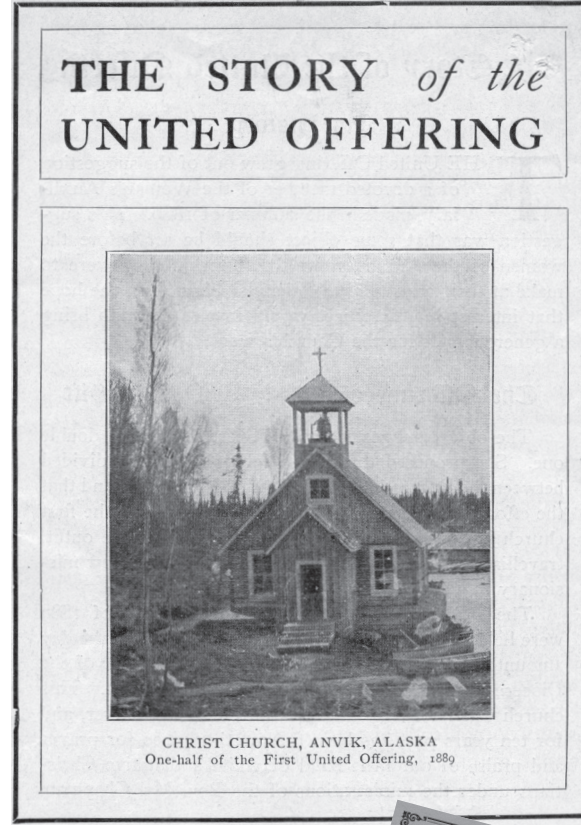


By 1882 The Episcopal Church was supporting 29 missionary bishops – 7 foreign and 22 domestic. These missionary bishops increasingly looked to the Women's Auxiliary to the Board of Missions of The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society for support and the women of The Episcopal Church responded generously. Through direct contributions called "specials" the Women's Auxiliary became a primary funder for the work of the missionary bishops. Through their missioner supply box program they provided lay resources for missionaries in the

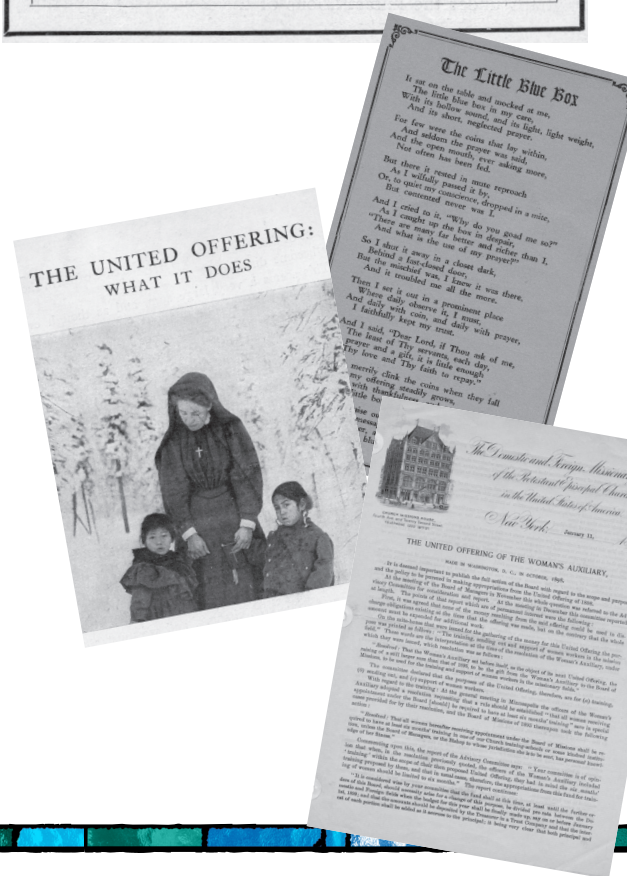


domestic and foreign fields. In 1883 a collection was taken at the worship service during the Auxiliary's meeting. \$371.21 was collected and divided among the domestic and foreign mission fields. In 1886 the collection dropped to just \$82.71 to benefit the Diocese of Florida "for work among colored people," so the women decided to change the offering in the hopes of funding more mission work.

At the 1889 Triennial Meeting in New York the Women's Auxiliary instituted the United Offering for the support of specific mission projects and individual missionaries. The first United Offering totaled \$2,188.64 and was used to build a church in Anvik, Alaska and to send a woman missionary to Japan. The United Offering eventually became known as the United Thank Offering (UTO) for collecting the prayers and grateful offerings of the women of The Episcopal Church in thanksgiving for the many blessings of this life. Blue mite boxes, known affectionately as "Blue Boxes," were used to collect the offerings of the women of The Episcopal Church and eventually achieved almost iconic status as the symbol of the UTO.



In time the UTO, through its Blue Boxes, became the single most important extra-budgetary source for funding of specific missionary projects, growing from just over \$2,000.00 in 1889 to \$107,207.83 by the turn of the 20th century. It was at the Triennial Meetings of the Women's Auxiliary, which ran concurrently with the exclusively male General Convention, where the women of The Episcopal Church came together to promote and extend the missionary outreach of the Church, particularly women missionaries, through the United Thank Offering.







The General Convention of 1919 radically reorganized the missionary, educational and social service work of The Episcopal Church by combining the Board of Missions of The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, the Board of Religious Education, and the Commission on Social Service into one national body under the auspices of the National Council (later to known as the Executive Council). The National Council, along with canonical changes calling for an elected presiding bishop and a financial plan that provided funds from dioceses to support the Church-wide program, effectively created what would later be known as the “National Church.” Recognizing the key role that the Auxiliary played in supporting the Church’s missionary outreach and not wanting to jeopardize the funding provided by the women of the Church, especially through the UTO, the decision was made that the Women’s Auxiliary would remain a separate organization and become “auxiliary” to the male-dominated National Council.



The work of the Women’s Auxiliary and the United Thank Offering continued to grow in the early decades of the 20th century. Although seemingly “separate but equal” the work of the women of the Church on behalf of women, particularly women missionaries, expanded to the point that at the 1937 Triennial a United Thank Offering Committee was created to oversee the UTO. Under the auspices of the UTO Committee, the United Thank Offering continued to grow in influence and amount of money ingathered. Increasingly the National Council began to look to the Women’s Auxiliary and the UTO to help underwrite the Church-wide budget. This support for the work of the wider Church provided by the women of the Church called into question how “auxiliary” the Women’s Auxiliary really was.



The growing role of women in the programs of the National Council in the mid-20th century resulted in a significant organizational change and in 1958 the Women’s Auxiliary



became the General Division of Women's Work within the official general Church structures. Ostensibly women would no longer be seen as auxiliary in the life of The Episcopal Church. With the creation of the General Division of Women's Work, a debate arose as to the nature and purpose of the United Thank Offering. At the same time, and much to the worry of many of the leaders of the former Women's Auxiliary, the Presiding Bishop and the National Council increasingly looked to the women to help underwrite the program budget of the "National Church." Particularly noteworthy was the UTO support for initial funding of the 1967 General Convention Special Program called for by Presiding Bishop John Hines to address the urban unrest and civil rights-related strife in the United States. This same convention passed the canonical change that allowed women to be seated as deputies to General Convention beginning in 1970.



The 1960s and 1970s were times of significant challenge to the established programs and structures of mainline American Protestantism. In The Episcopal Church the role of women in the governance and sacramental leadership was hotly debated. In 1970 women were seated for the first time as deputies to General Convention and in 1974 11 women deacons were irregularly ordained priests in Philadelphia. Two years later the General Convention changed the Church's canons, allowing for recognized ordination of women to all three holy orders. Responding to these changing circumstances the Executive Council (successor to the National Council) in 1968 established a Standing Committee for Women to replace the General Division of Women's Work. This change signaled the end of a distinct entity of the Church charged with coordinating and directing the work of women in The Episcopal Church. In the politically charged atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s the particular historic vocation of the Women's Auxiliary, with its specific focus on the missionary work of and for women, gave way to the more diffuse Episcopal Church Women.







With the loss of the Women's Auxiliary and the General Division of Women's Work a new UTO Committee was organized in 1971 as an entity unto itself to oversee and direct the work of the United Thank Offering. The UTO Committee comprised one representative from each of the Church's nine provinces, two members of the new Committee for Women, one member of the Executive Council and one member from the new Standing Committee on Lay Ministries. The United Thank Offering continued to have professional staff as a part of The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society and the Committee oversaw the ingathering and granting of funds raised by the ingathering each year. While internal adjustments to the governance of The Episcopal Church in the last decades of the 20th century resulted in changes to both the Committee on Women and the Standing Committee on Lay Ministries, the structure of the UTO Committee continued to draw its membership from churchwomen from the nine provinces of The Episcopal Church with Executive Council representation.

In 2007 the Office of the Presiding Bishop began a comprehensive study of all agencies of The Episcopal Church that fell under Executive Council auspices, including their governance, fiscal, and liability responsibilities. The policies and procedures of the United Thank Offering Committee were included in this broad study. The study discovered that an accountability gap had developed with the loss of a liaison from the Executive Council to the UTO Committee. To address this governance issue an Advisory Committee on the United Thank Offering was appointed by Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori in 2008. At its October 2008 meeting the Executive Council received a preliminary report from the Presiding Bishop's Advisory Committee on the United Thank Offering. Some of the recommendations of the preliminary report were not well received by the UTO Committee and the Committee began to pursue other options. The Executive Council responded by calling for "a serious and extensive study of the current and future of the United Thank Offering as to its roles, purposes, function, operational procedures and vision for faithfulness to God's mission in the 21st century." (See resolution INC-055, attached.) In response to resolution INC-055, the Presiding Bishop and the President of the House of Deputies appointed a Working Group to make recommendations to the 2012 General Convention as to how the United Thank Offering could go forward in this new century as a dynamic and reinvigorated response of The Episcopal Church to God's mission in the world.





As a result of the recommendations coming out of the 2012 General Convention the UTO Committee was transformed into the UTO Board and the Ingathering increased for the first time since the late 1970s. That is not to say that that 2012-2015 was an easy three years. Change is difficult and learning new ways of behaving often causes growing pains. The UTO Board adopted new bylaws and a Memorandum of Understanding that govern its relationships and work. A wonderful document, *Theology of Thankfulness*, was produced to guide and better define the spiritual discipline side of the ministry. While undergoing structural changes to abide by audit guidelines and best practices the Board also worked internally to review the process by which funds were granted, developing special awards leading up to the 125th anniversary of the United Thank Offering and new processes for evaluating applications. With the help of The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society the Board created new educational materials and found ways to reach out to different populations of the Church who were not part of the United Thank Offering in the past.



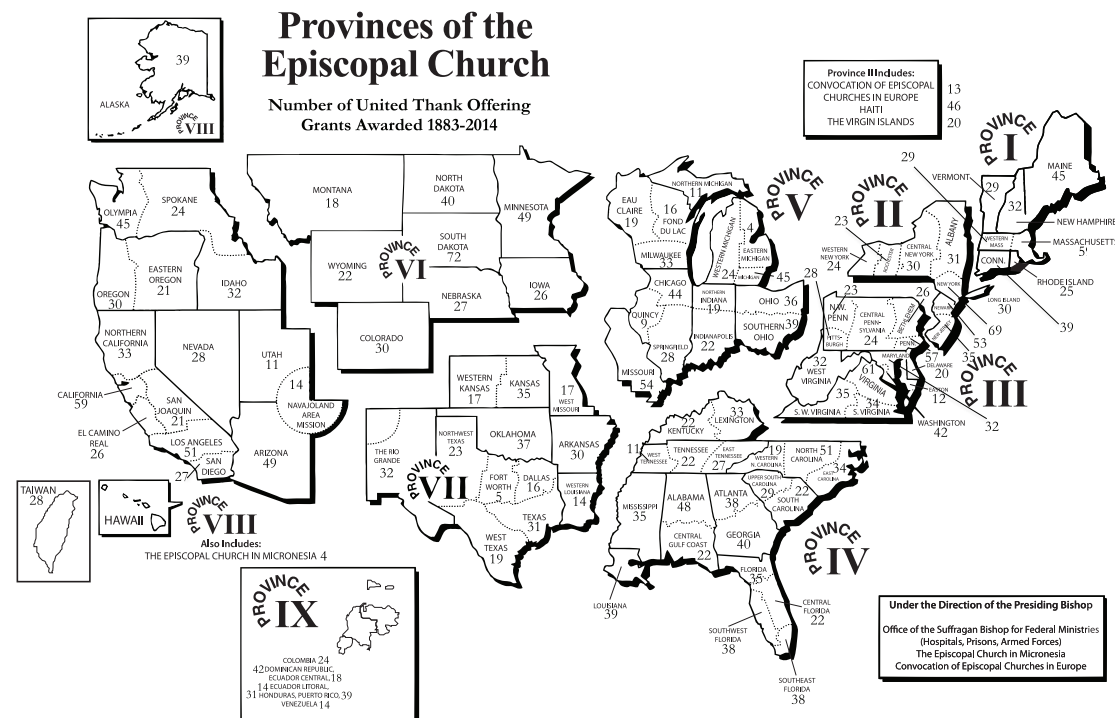
As we approach the 125th anniversary of this great ministry there is still much work to be done to strengthen and increase participation. Through the use of technology the staff and Board are able to engage with more of the grassroots network that comprises the United Thank Offering and to offer help, support and encouragement to its leaders. The Board, with the help and support of The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, has taken great steps to ensure that the ministry will continue among new generations and in new ways. The ministry of the United Thank Offering has remained the same since its founding – recognize your blessings and make a thank offering into your Blue Box, and it will go to support mission and ministry around the world. In a time of dwindling resources and growing anxiety and cynicism the United Thank Offering is a much-needed ministry, not only in our Church but also in our world.



# AN OVERVIEW OF THE UNITED THANK OFFERING INGATHERING AND AWARDS

In many ways, the awarded grants of the United Thank Offering tell the story of how American culture and society have changed and how our relationships overseas have evolved. The vision for the use of funds from the United Thank Offering was to support mission and ministry that the Church budget had not yet expanded to be able to fund. Once the budget was able to expand to fund the program, then new innovative ministries could be funded. This is why the United Thank Offering stopped sending women missionaries in the 1960s, it was time for The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society budget to expand to send the missionaries and for the Offering to fund new ministries. In 125 years, the United Thank Offering has collected and given away \$133,355,181.05. This represents 5,121 grants, an unfortunately unknown number of women missionaries trained and sent to do mission, as well as an unknown number of deaconess trained for ministry among us. In 125 years, funds have built or helped to build 1,337 buildings, and renovated (or helped to renovate) 1,060 structures. 403 vehicles (vans, mini-buses, buses, trucks), 2 airplanes, 6 boats, 1 ambulance and a forklift were provided to support ministry, and 3,422 programs were funded. 526 staff positions were funded and 92 grants went to directly support our missionaries. 30 grants helped refugees and 16 grants were to Episcopal Migration Ministry affiliates. Every diocese of the Episcopal Church has received at least one UTO Grant and 1,237 grants were awarded to overseas dioceses or provinces. (369 to Africa, 279 to Asia, 31 to Europe (not in the Convocation), 107 to Latin or South America, 41 to the Middle East, 365 to our Covenant

partners and 31 to churches in Europe not a part of the Convocation). In 125 years, \$29,012,382.76 has gone to fund and directly support the work of The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society by sending missionaries; creating pension funds; hiring staff to work with underserved populations; and financially supporting conferences, programs, newsletters, and materials for mission education, including to support the work of the United Thank Offering prior to the creation of the Memorial Gift Trust Fund.



A complete listing of grants awarded by the United Thank Offering can be found on our webpage, [www.episcopalchurch.org/uto](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/uto), and our staff is happy to help you search the list for specific dioceses or projects. What follows are some of the highlights of the types of ministries funded by decade.



*This* LIST SHOWS HOW *the* UNITED THANK OFFERING HAS FUNDED MISSION *and* MINISTRY DESPERATELY NEEDED *in* COMMUNITIES AROUND *the* WORLD WHEN FUNDING WASN'T AVAILABLE ANYWHERE ELSE. *The* BLESSINGS WE RECOGNIZE WHEN WE PUT *a* COIN INTO OUR BLUE BOXES TRULY BLESS OTHERS.

### 1883-1898

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Funding during this time built churches in missionary dioceses, sent missionaries, and funded the salaries for the missionary bishops in Oklahoma and Alaska.

### 1901-1919

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During this period of time, the United Thank Offering continued to send women missionaries, and it built and funded schools and one hospital. The Offering also funded missionary bishops.

### 1922-1937

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The time between the World Wars allowed for the expansion of the work of the United Thank Offering. The bulk of the Offering was used to train, equip, and send missionaries and to support the ones already working overseas or in the missionary dioceses of The Episcopal Church. The Offering also built hospitals and schools and started Deaconess Houses, including St. Margaret's House in Berkeley, California.



### 1940-1949

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During World War II, the women fought to keep the Offering from declining. They continued to send missionaries and create training centers. The Offering also was used to give aid to war prisoners, to build and support orphanages, and to create a pension fund for the missionaries that had returned home. The money built churches and schools in the U.S., Brazil, China, and India. It also created ministries to sharecroppers, migrants farm workers, and minorities.

### 1952-1958

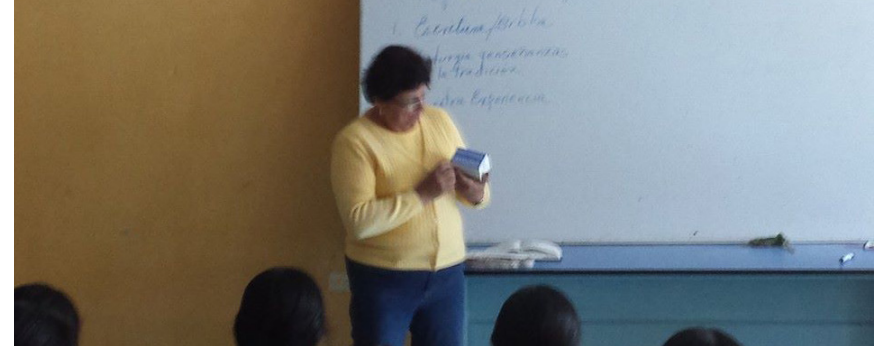
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The '50s were a time of prosperity in the United States, and the United Thank Offering flourished. Missionaries were equipped, trained, and sent; Christian educational materials were produced (in English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese); and ministries to migrant workers, low-income farmers, college students, and lepers were funded. UTO also constructed buildings – churches, rectories, multipurpose spaces, dormitories, and hospitals – and renovated buildings in Cuba, France, Germany, Liberia, India, Japan, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Arizona, Haiti, Idaho, Kansas, Mexico, Nicaragua, North Dakota, Panama, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, West Texas, Korea, and the Philippines. UTO also contributed to the building of the headquarters for the World Council of Churches in Geneva.



## 1961-1969

The '60s were a time of great change in the United States and the effects of these changes are seen in the shift in UTO grants during this time from missions to ministry. It was during the 1960s that grants went from being awarded every three years to every year. Thirty-two dioceses in The Episcopal Church (as we now know it) had at least one building paid for by the Offering and eight countries outside of the U.S. had at least one building erected. The shift in the 1960s was to fund programs. The Offering helped fund 10 childcare facilities in the United States, often with the note that these were in places where “women were forced to work,” meaning that they didn’t want to leave their home but needed the income, or low income. Ministries to Native Americans were funded along with scholarships for Native American children. Several alcohol prevention programs for women were created as well as halfway houses for “delinquent girls” or “deprived children.” Education and training programs for social action were also created and funded.



## 1970-1979

In the 1970s the United Thank Offering began to decline but the needs met by the funded programs became more urgent. Buildings still needed to be renovated or built but in addition an an increasing number of programs addressing social issues were funded. “Self-help” became a major force and “self-help” centers for the homeless, ex-offenders, drug addicts, alcoholics and others were funded throughout The Episcopal Church. In the early '70s, about one-third of the grants went to provide childcare for those who needed it. There were numerous grants to create centers to minister to the families of prisoners while visiting their loved ones. Camps to bring different races together, work in Northern Ireland, ecumenical projects and nonprofits also benefited from the Offering during this time. Awards were given to fund alcohol treatment centers, centers for cancer patients, mental health centers, healthcare for the poor, maritime ministries and inner-city work. Programs were funded to help people find jobs and to care for children who were handicapped or troubled. UTO also funded grants to help overseas dioceses move to self-sufficiency, many of which are now Covenant partners. There were awards to ministries that are heartbreaking and yet so important, such as a drug treatment center in Florida for girls ages 4-12 years old. Other ministries were funded that remind us of the power of bringing folks together, like a coffeehouse in Massachusetts run by young adults where they could offer help to other young adults suffering from drug addiction.



## 1980-1989

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During this decade the United Thank Offering saw an increased need of funding for hospice centers across the United States. Overseas, more buildings were needed as dioceses were created and churches established. As the decade continued grants increased for domestic violence centers, including funding to transform an empty convent in Illinois into a shelter for battered women and their children. Programs also were created to address HIV and AIDS. Toward the end of the decade, grants focused on apartheid in South Africa. Homelessness was also a major concern, as shown by the grants given to renovate buildings that housed community service organizations, food banks, soup kitchens, and job assistance centers as well as professional staff to support these programs. (In 1986, Hands Across America was formed to try and unite Americans in the fight against hunger across country.) Grants were awarded to address racial issues in various locations. Many teen pregnancy centers were started as were programs to help teen parents graduate from high school. Support was also given to family farmers, refugees and immigrants. At the end of the decade every diocese was given a Centennial Grant of \$1,500 to celebrate 100 years of the United Thank Offering. These grants helped to send people to Africa



and the Holy Land, funded mission development and evangelism efforts, started Education for Ministry in many dioceses and supported a ministry to help lesbian and gay individuals find reconciliation with their families and friends.

## 1990-1999

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In the 1990s grants shift from funding programs and spaces to funding professional staff members to address the same issues that volunteer-run programs did in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Dioceses were provided funding for after-school programs for latch-key kids; programs and support for the elderly, including work with people diagnosed with Alzheimer's; healthcare and free clinics; support, housing, and care for AIDS patients; literacy and GED tutoring; support for incarcerated mothers; support for teen parents; community organizing groups; education for single mothers; housing and food for the homeless; halfway houses to keep youth out of prison or juvenile detention centers; programs to address high rates of infant mortality; programs to address sexual harassment and workplace discrimination of women; advocacy and outreach work with migrant and immigrant farm workers; and refugee ministry. Early in the 1990s The Episcopal Church Committee on the Status of Women received a grant from UTO to host regional training to help congregations address issues of domestic violence. Overseas grants focused on building or renovating centers for dioceses and new churches in the "mission field," as well as repairing churches destroyed in wars in Africa and by earthquakes in the Philippines and bringing buildings up to code in Latin America. Two grants in particular were interesting – one in North Dakota was used to "replace a 27-year-old paint-job on a plane used by the bishop for his pastoral visits



to isolated communities and to buy radio navigational gear for safer flights,” and another helped underwrite the United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. In 1999, a grant was given to Oklahoma to contribute to the rebuilding of a transitional housing center that was destroyed in the Oklahoma City bombing.

## 2000-2010

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At the beginning of a new millennium new regulations were enacted that directly affected many of the ministries the United Thank Offering had funded in the past few decades. Congregations were faced with health code inspections, forcing many kitchens to be renovated in order to continue feeding those in need. Accreditation for childcare was put into effect, requiring many of those ministries to hire staff, purchase equipment or build playgrounds. Perhaps the most challenging regulation facing churches is the Americans with Disabilities Act which was put into effect in 1992. Although churches are exempt many still needed to make upgrades in order to continue their outreach ministries. For many, funding from the United Thank Offering allowed these ministries to continue meeting the needs of the surrounding community. In spite of the high number of grants awarded to meet these regulations the United Thank Offering was still able to fund some innovative and important ministries. The Diocese of Minnesota translated the Book of Common Prayer into Hmong and the Province of Kenya translated the Book of Common Prayer and The Hymnal 1982 into several different local languages. Computer laboratories were opened across the country to teach computer skills to refugees, immigrants, youth and job seekers. Water systems in Asia and Africa were funded, as well as agricultural projects across Africa. The first grant for discussions and

educational materials addressing the death penalty was awarded. There were many grants to continue after-school and summer enrichment programs, work with migrant and refugee groups and re-entry programs for ex-offenders. New programs, such as anti-racism training and conflict resolution also received support. Grants assisted with rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina. The United Thank Offering also awarded funds to upgrade the Anglican Church in Athens for the Chaplaincy Provision for the Olympic Games in Greece.



## 2010-2015

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In the last five years the United Thank Offering has returned to its original focus: funding innovative ministries that the Church budget has not yet expanded to fund. From mobile shower units for the homeless in San Diego to a wood bank in Montana, the United Thank Offering is funding new and outside-the-box ideas. Agricultural projects, which were funded in the previous decade in Africa, were now being funded in the United States and around the world. During this time a greater number of funded projects focused on development, from a Blue Corn



Project in Navajoland to vocational programs in the United States and beyond. Water, solar power and electricity were also provided to missions and ministries. Leading up to the 125th anniversary of the United Thank Offering each province (and the Presiding Bishop) was awarded a special grant to fund an innovative ministry. Each province also was awarded a grant to support ministries led by young adults. These special grants funded an intentional community in Virginia, a group for young Hmong adults in Minnesota, a food truck/chapel in North Carolina and a project to help churches reimagine their outdoor spaces as places to grow food.





## THE UNITED THANK OFFERING

The Domestic and Foreign

Missionary Society

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