

REGIONAL ENCUENTROS

When women get together to solve a problem or meet a need, amazing things happen! Since the 1920s, Presbyterian Hispanic and Latin women from New York to Mexico have been organizing themselves for study and service in various ways. The song did not all start in one place and at one time, however, as the following examples show.



Synod of the Northeast

In 1960–1962, a group of pastor’s wives in four New York counties started organizing women in their congregations to share common concerns and dreams and to stimulate participation within their church and community. Maria Manejias, a pastor’s wife and past national moderator of Cuban Presbyterian Women, led the movement. In 1965, she called for an assembly of Hispanic women in New York City Presbytery. There, they organized the Asociacion de Mujeres Hispanas de New York City. The first president (moderator) elected was Maria Manejias.

Later, in the 1980s, Rev. Barbara Cathey, inspired by the new national Presbyterian Women organization, invited the Hispanic women of New Jersey to a Bible study. From this grew the New Jersey Presbyterian Women’s organization, with Eunice Ramirez as the first president. Yolanda S. Hernandez, PC (USA) Women’s Ministry national staff for Hispanic women, played an important role supporting and empowering these groups in the beginning.



Synod of Lincoln Trails

During the late 1960s, Hispanic women in two Midwestern congregations, Emmanuel and Ravenswood, organized “Sociedades Femeniles”, to support the work of local churches. In the 1970s the women of two new churches, Betania and San Marcos, organized their groups, but after 10 years these churches closed. In the 1980s the women joined to development leadership under Presbyterian

American Counseling (PLAC). Not until the 1990s were two new Hispanic churches, Vida Nueva and Canto de Esperanza, chartered. In 1995 women of these four churches attended Encuentro 1, the first national assembly of Presbyterian Hispanic women. The women returned home inspired to organize the first regional Encuentro in September 1996. A steering committee continued working until 1999 when they organized HLPW, electing Cecilia Casal as the first moderator.



1991 the women created the first Hispanic Coordinating Team in Tropical Florida Presbytery, with Zoraida Joraz as the first moderator.

Synod of South Atlantic

In the 1980s, Hispanic women of Tropical Florida Presbytery organized themselves into groups at the congregation level. Dr. Carlota Gutierrez then gathered these groups together to organize at the presbytery level. Again, in this process Yolanda Hernandez played an important role, providing guidance and staff support.

In December 1989, Zoraida Joraz and Nelia Senti called Hispanic women to a meeting at First Presbyterian Church in Miami. Responding enthusiastically, the women elected Zoraida as their leader. Finally, in

Puerto Rico

Way back in the 1920s, Presbyterian women on the island of Puerto Rico joined United Presbyterian Women in the Synod of New York, of which Puerto Rico was a member at the time. In 1926 they organized as “Sociedades Misioneras de Damas del Presbiterio de Puerto Rico”, with Josefa Toro as the first Presbiterial president. In 1973 Puerto Rico becomes a Synod and they organized as Sinodal de Mujeres, and Carmen Riviere-Rosario was the first president. But not until early 1990 did Puerto Rican women become part of the growing Hispanic Presbyterian Women movement, and in late 1995 they also become part of HLPW’s first



national assembly, Encuentro 1. They continue under PW today, with a representative on the PW Churchwide Coordinating Team. Nanin Braulio, Emma Roura, Minerva Bravo, Mildred Morales and others were ready to serve and gave your time and gifts to the God’s work.

Synod of the Sun

As early as 1946, Southwestern women formed La Femenil de Mujeres Presbiterianas Mexicanas to support the work of the churches. Much later, in the 1970s Hispanic women began to participate in events with Anglo women, but in 1980 they also started a separate Hispanic Women’s annual retreat, La



Conferencia de MoRanch. Synod of the Sun supports this ministry through the Hispanic Latin Ministries Council (HLMC). Women such as Lidia Frias, Angie Abrego, Luisa Rodriguez and Beatriz Fernandez have helped in this process.



Synod of California and Hawaii

During the 1930s, Hispanic church women in Los Angeles, San Fernando, Riverside, Santa Ana, San Bernardino, San Diego and elsewhere organized as Convencion Presbiteriana. They also created Sociedades Femeniles to support the work of local churches and discuss women's common concerns. In 1939 the women organized a

meeting and decided to unite all Sociedades Femeniles as the Federacion Femenil Presbiteriana del Sur de California. The first officers were Guadalupe Falcon, SG. de Venecia, Herlinda Falcon, Adela Velasco, Maria Paniagua y Rebecca Rodriguez.

Eventually, in the 1980s they also began to work with and participate in Anglo-organized events. Later, in 1990 they officially organized HLPW and elected their first Coordinating Team. Aide Andrade was the first moderator.



Synod of the Pacific

Two different events mark the beginning of the relatively recent organization of women's work in this synod. Early in 1993, churches in the Hispanic Caucus in the southern Sierra Mission area (today known as Valle de San Joaquin) celebrated a Family Camp and Retreat event; Hispanic women took advantage of the opportunity to interact as separate group.

In January 1996, women from churches in the northern area called La Bahia met at San Mateo Presbyterian Church for a training workshop under the auspices of Betty Greenlee, Silvia Velazquez and the Hispanic Caucus. There, they officially organized HLPW and elected their first moderator, Marta Coulter. A few

years later, the southern informal group united with the northern organized group to become "Mujeres Hispanas Latinas Presbiterianas" in the Synod of the Pacific.

Note: This information was compiled from different written sources and interviews with sisters who have participated in the events.