

## Self-reliance in charitable work: A New Way 1960 - 1980

It was a new era for the United Nations Women's Guild. Their logo first appeared in 1960. It was designed by M. Claude Bottiau of the Presentation Unit of the Publishing Service. His cooperation and his artistic talents were much appreciated.

As we have seen, 1960 also marked the publication of the first edition of the Newsletter to serve as a "means of keeping in touch with past members and also with associations of U.N. Women in other parts of the world." Besides being a record of annual events, it contained reports from Ghana, Burma and Peru, and as the years went by, the list grew: Costa Rica, Tunisia, Turkey, Switzerland, Thailand, Zaire, Philippines, Cameroon, Venezuela, Austria, Trinidad and Tobago, Afghanistan, Iran, Italy, Ethiopia, Korea, India, Egypt, Indonesia, Zambia, Pakistan and Guatemala. Because of the increasingly encouraging interest, a resolution was adopted at the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting in 1961 expressing friendship and promising assistance and cooperation with sister groups around the world.

For the first time, an itemized list of donations appeared in the 1962 newsletter. The five groups (Great Neck, Parkway Village, Manhattan, the Secretariat and Westchester) provided \$1,242.00 to eleven charities. On that list was a contribution of \$425 to buy equipment for the Handicapped Centre in Leopoldville in the Congo near to where the late Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjold, had been killed in a plane crash. By comparison, 1980 accounts showed donations of more than \$33,000 to seventy seven different hospitals, child care centres, schools, orphanages and children's projects.

Much of the Guild's income in the early days came from the sale of the book of folk tales 'Ride with the Sun,' but the decision to publish a second volume met with difficulties. Harold Courlander moved to Washington and his busy schedule made it impossible for him to continue as editor. The number of countries to be included had risen from twenty-three to forty and with so much still to be done before publication could be considered, the committee reluctantly agreed to postpone the project. Ultimately, the whole undertaking was shelved since it became too unwieldy. The UNWG committee returned to the idea of a paperback edition of 'Ride with the Sun' but this required complicated negotiations with the publishers, McGraw-Hill, for a reversion of rights.

In 1962, the outgoing president, Kathleen Read, expressed the hope that the Guild, now more involved in fund raising, would not forget its original purpose "to supply garments and comforts and otherwise assist children in need throughout the world, and thus serve as a mutual bond of interest for women connected with the United Nations."

In the 1963 newsletter there is certainly much evidence of busy hands. In Lima, members of the U.N. Women's Club prepared layettes for needy mothers. In Ankara, ladies created soft toys and sewed blouses for older girls to wear to school. In Accra, there were soft toys and books to be made. In New York, the small Parkway Village Group completed 139 garments, while the eleven members of the Great Neck Group knitted baby garments, blankets and sweaters. Westchester dispatched 154 knitted items and the busy, working members of the Secretariat Group also sewed 40 dresses and



knitted sweaters. But problems were becoming apparent throughout the New York Groups.

On the positive side, the Calendar Towel project, conceived at this time, was not only a financial success but also brought a spirit of unity and cooperation to the groups, something which was sorely needed at this point. A shrinking membership with constant departures to "the field" was a depressing fact. In the beginning, the fellowship and common purpose of the Guild members was a comfort to women who found themselves in a strange environment unprepared to receive them. Later, however, with the expansion of the U.N. they were accepted in the community. Wives were busy, and since their stay in New York was often for only a short time, they were not always enthusiastic about giving their spare hours to knitting, chatting and exchanging recipes. Mention should be made here of the Hospitality Committee of the National Council of Women and the warm welcome it extends. This wonderful organization has continued from the beginning to offer weekly programs of great interest to U.N. and diplomatic service wives.

Although members still responded immediately and generously to emergency clothing drives and could be relied on to knit garments for destitute children, the Guild was developing a more practical and efficient approach to fund raising. Volunteers discovered that it was fun to sell Calendar Towels, to talk to customers, and to explain the aims of the organization which brought a sense of achievement, especially if the sales were good. Initially, the Guild set up a table near the UNESCO Counter and the book shop to sell the Calendar Towels. Phyllis Luke said, "We have made a large sum of money all of which will go to children in need. We have made it together. Each group has supplied some of the effort to bring about this result, and in that effort many friendships have been made and strengthened."

In 1967, UNWG shop moved across the concourse facing UNICEF. Here they had a spotlight and a poster, made by M. de Hamann, entitled "where your Calendar Towel dollars go" with photographs of some of the young recipients of UNWG assistance. Members of the Parkway-Queens, Westchester and Manhattan Groups took turns to staff the table while the Secretariat ladies handled supplies. The small Nassau (Great Neck) Group took care of mail orders.

A committee supervised the choice of designs and also arranged for printing and packaging. Artists in those early days included Mesdames Kay, Bimbi, Poullain, Wronker, Lee, Kim, Ikemoto, Case, Morris Granby, Zinna and Chan. Help came from the Office of General Services and, in particular, from the Buildings Management Services. They assisted with the sales and storage facilities. Lenka Reiner and Ruby Brill deserve special mention for volunteering to keep the shop open during the weekends as does Alice Lippetz, a founding member, who is exemplary in her service to the Guild. 1967 was a record year for the Calendar Towel since the Montreal Expo brought many tourists to New York. Amazingly, 17,632 towels were sold.

Other fund raising ideas came to the fore over the years and in 1960, a small 'Study Group' from Westchester announced plans to compile an International Cookbook. Two small booklets of recipes had already proved very popular and Parkway-Queens contributed a selection from their recipe club. Overseas groups were also asked to contribute and eventually in 1976, Elsa Shapiro undertook the mammoth task of testing,



tasting and talking to publishers. Great care was taken to adapt quantities to standard American measurements and to choose dishes with readily available ingredients. Lili Wronker and Maria Davelaar provided the art work while other volunteers edited and proof-read the recipes.

The first copies went on sale in October, 1977. A second, and even a third, printing followed. Now the shop had the Calendar Towel and the Cookbook and Laura Zinna's canvas tote bag was added soon after. This too proved extremely popular and the first order of three thousand sold out. Other items included souvenir 'pop-up' cards, hexagonal calendars, button pins, New York city street guides and flower seeds. The Guild shop had become a busy and profitable enterprise and the main focus of Guild fund raising.

In 1966, a Welcome Committee was formed to provide every newly arrived U.N. wife with the personal support of a Guild member. This 'good neighbour' would be armed with information about schools, kindergartens, baby sitters, language classes, medical services, transport and shopping. The Committee tried to find ladies of the same nationality or, at least the same language.

Meanwhile, a revised constitution to reflect the increased scope of the Guild was under discussion in a committee led by the dynamic Alice El-Tawil. This was officially accepted in February, 1971, sixteen years after the Guild's first constitution was drawn up. Among the revisions were:

- a more explicit definition of the duties of the Co-ordination Board.
- the Co-ordination Board was given official sanction to administer and apportion monies raised by Guild efforts.
- the President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer were to be elected at the Annual General Meeting in February (not just the President as in the past).
- members could attend any Group meeting but hold voting privileges only in the Group to which they paid their dues.
- provision was made for special members.

The office of Honorary President was added in the expectation that the wife of the Secretary-General would agree to serve and, in 1972, Mrs. Elizabeth Waldheim graciously accepted the Guild's invitation.

Thus the Co-ordination Board now had a president, secretary and treasurer elected at the Annual General Meeting. These officers acted for the Guild as a whole and not for their respective groups. As laid down in the constitution, the money raised by the joint efforts of the Guild members continued to be administered by the Board which had no jurisdiction over group funds.

The introduction of a Co-ordination Board was important because it united the groups under a common leadership. The Board met once a month, initially in the president's house but later in the Church Centre of the United Methodist Office. However, in September, 1976, due to the extraordinary efforts of President Margarita Muller, the Guild was given the right to rent-free office space as an organization supporting the work of the U.N. (General Document A/C 5/31/17). The Guild moved



into the newly opened D.C.I Building in 1977 and this became its home and repository of records, archives and stationery. Better yet, it now had a permanent mailing address and its own telephone number.

Over the years, the number of Groups shrank from five to four. With the removal of the U.N. from Lake Success, few families remained in the area. In 1970, the Great Neck Group became the Nassau Group but, in spite of the heroic efforts made by Charlotte Cashton, the president elected in 1967, the Group was disbanded in 1974 and its seven remaining members were encouraged to join other Groups. A notable achievement of the Great Neck Group was the hugely successful 'Ride with the Sun.' Their generosity in sharing the profits with all the Groups set an important precedent.

The Parkway Village Group also changed its name, becoming, in 1972, the Parkway-Queens Group. Meetings were held in members' homes between 11:00 AM and 3:00 PM to accommodate the variety of schedules of mothers with young children. These members were knitters, did handicrafts and were also known for their exotic dishes. Although small, the Group was always ready to assist in the Guild projects.

Luba Rodzianko, assistant director of the Manhattan Group, moved to Westchester County in 1953 and immediately helped to form the Westchester Group. It benefited from a warm relationship with the local community through the Westchester Hospitality Committee to the International Community headed first by Clara McIntyre and later by Mary Alice Ughetta. These ladies were unfailingly generous and supportive. The Scarsdale Friends provided their Meeting House for bi-monthly gatherings. At that time, it was the only Group with an adjunct Bridge Club. Westchester was happy to join in all activities, the membership rose steadily and by 1980 had become the second largest Group in the New York area.

Qualification for membership of the Secretariat Group was full time employment in the U.N. However, the achievement of this small band was out of all proportion to its size. Members arranged for the U.N. staff to help them with the reception of supplies, preparation of inventories, finding storage and space and equipment for bazaars. They maintained excellent relations with the Printing Section. Indeed, the Guild had good reason to believe that without these resourceful ladies it would not have been easy to function at all.

From 1960, the Manhattan Group met at the New York Academy of Sciences on 44<sup>th</sup> Street. In 1965, they began holding their meetings in the Church Centre opposite the U.N. This was a happy choice. Director Lousie McCrensky wrote of the Church staff in 1971, "They make us feel so welcome and give one answer to our every request - no problem."

Being so close to the U.N., the Group benefited from a large and enthusiastic membership. Many ladies served on the Co-ordination Board and volunteered to work on standing committees and special projects. Their annual bazaars and other fund-raising events were highly successful and enabled the Group to sponsor a wide variety of projects in many countries, never forgetting help for the less fortunate children in the poorer areas of New York City. With the expansion of the U.N., the Group also grew and was a constant source of strength and vitality.

Thus the Guild developed and prospered. Guidelines had to be followed and committee meetings could be long and, on occasions, difficult. Nevertheless, the ladies of the Guild were united in their determination to 'make a difference' in the lives of at least a few of the world's countless needy children. The shop provided a steady source of income, although never enough to meet all the requests, the ladies were ready with helpful ideas. The 21<sup>st</sup> Newsletter in 1980 was full of happy photographs, much information and an overall sense of optimism. Looking at the smiling faces from so many lands, the future of the UNWG looked bright and assured.