



## Telling Our Stories

250 Years of United Methodism  
in the New York Area

1766-2016

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## *First Woman Ordained in the New York East Conference*

**1894-1994**

# Elsie F. Stowe

**R**ev. Elsie F. Stowe, ordained a Local Deacon in 1927 and a Local Elder in 1929, believed strongly in rural ministry. She served as pastor to four rural churches in western CT in her career.

The path to women's ordination in the ME Church was long and complicated. Maggie Newton Van Cott was the first woman to receive a local preacher's license, in 1869. But in 1880 General Conference voted against local preaching licenses for women, not granting them again until 1920. In 1924 women received limited clergy rights as local elders or deacons, but without conference membership; they were not granted full clergy rights until 1956.

Born in Monroe CT, Stowe graduated from the Blakeslee Deaconess Training School in New Haven in 1918. She was consecrated a deaconess in March 1920. Later that year she was granted a local preachers license, and in 1924 she officiated at her brother's marriage. The newspaper headline read: "Married by His Sister: Woman Minister Officiates at Stowe's Wedding to Woman Dentist."

Stowe dedicated herself to rural ministry in North Wilton and Seymour CT and later served as Matron of the Methodist Church Home in New Haven until her retirement in 1960.

### *For Discussion*

- Stowe began as a deaconess and became a local elder, taking advantage of opportunities as they presented themselves. Share stories of women you know who have done the most they could with what they had.
- Stowe dedicated herself to rural ministry. What are the particular challenges of rural ministry? What do healthy rural and healthy urban congregations look like?

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