

THERESSA HOOVER



Dr. Xue Zheng, principal of former Methodist girls' school in Shanghai, China, with Mai Gray, president of the Women's Division, and Theresa Hoover, the Women's Division's Associate General Secretary in 1980.



Theresa Hoover

Groundbreaking Mission Executive

Theresa Hoover was the first African-American woman to become a top executive for The United Methodist Church as head (1968–1990) of the Women's Division of the Board of Global Ministries, the then corporate body of United Methodist Women. She mentored many young women, promoted the leadership of laywomen and steered the women's mission organization through a period of change.

A native of Arkansas, Theresa was one of five children of James C. Hoover and Rissie Vaughn. After her mother died when she was small, her father, a city hospital orderly, taught her to be fearless and gave her the confidence to do what she needed to do. She graduated from Philander Smith College in 1946 and two years later joined the staff of the Woman's Division of Christian Service, part of the Board of Missions, as a field worker for the denomination's racially segregated

Central Jurisdiction. Traveling in the United States in Jim Crow days was no easy thing for an African-American woman, and it was not easy to move into an all-white staff at the mission agency.

The year that Hoover was elected the Women's Division top executive (1968) was a pivotal one as the Methodist and Evangelical United Brethren churches united. Hoover's "outstanding leadership" in the process was crucial in an era when it was difficult for a woman of color to command influence and power, according to a colleague.

Possessed with an active prayer life and deep grounding in the faith and history of Methodism, Hoover was not afraid to "speak truth to power," and did so with grace, compassion and respect. "I think that she spelled out mission work for this denomination," says the Rev. William H. Robinson, Jr., founding pastor of the Theresa Hoover United Methodist Church in Little Rock, named for her.

Source: Linda Bloom, "Theresa Hoover: Larger than life...gentle as a dove," www.umnews.org, with modifications.

