

# Theresa Hoover: Leader and Vanguard

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## Legacy Stories

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Theresa Hoover

Theresa Hoover made sure to leave a legacy.

Theresa Hoover was the first African-American chief executive of United Methodist Women's national policymaking body. An outspoken advocate for women and children, she was the leader of the Women's Division from 1968 to 1990.

During Hoover's leadership, United Methodist Women's membership rolls totaled 1.2 million. While other Christian faith-based women's groups were losing financial and organizational autonomy at that time, under the leadership of Hoover, United Methodist Women grew in membership and retained its separate status.

"Every other denomination's women's mission organizations are now non-existent," said former colleague Joyce Hamlin. "We're the only one left and Theresa Hoover had everything do with that."

As a leader, Hoover made sure to lay solid groundwork for the future United Methodist Women by emphasizing the need to understand its membership and mission. Traveling across the U.S. as a black woman in Jim Crow days required sacrifices that others did not have to make, but her steadfast optimism persevered, and her strong leadership left a legacy of transformation.

Hoover was a firm believer in mentorship, taking women of all races under her wing, knowing that women from all walks of life are the foundation of the Church and organization. In recognition of her mentoring prowess, the Women's Division created the annual Theresa Hoover Community Service and Global Citizenship award when she retired in 1990.

## Early Years

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Theresa Hoover grew up in Texas and Arkansas, and studied business administration at Philander Smith College. In 1948, she joined the staff of the Woman's Division of Christian Service as a field worker, and in 1962 she earned a master's degree from New York University's Steinhardt School. In 1968 she was elected chief executive of the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church.

In 2004, *Ebony* magazine named Hoover one of the 100 most influential African-American women. In 1983, Hoover chronicled the work of United Methodist Women in her book *With Unveiled Face*. The Theresa Hoover United Methodist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, was named for her, an exceptional honor, as few churches are named for women in their lifetime. Over the years, the church has built new homes and supported projects for women, children and youth. Theresa Hoover's legacy lives on to this day.

*Posted or updated: 2/6/2019 12:00:00 AM*

