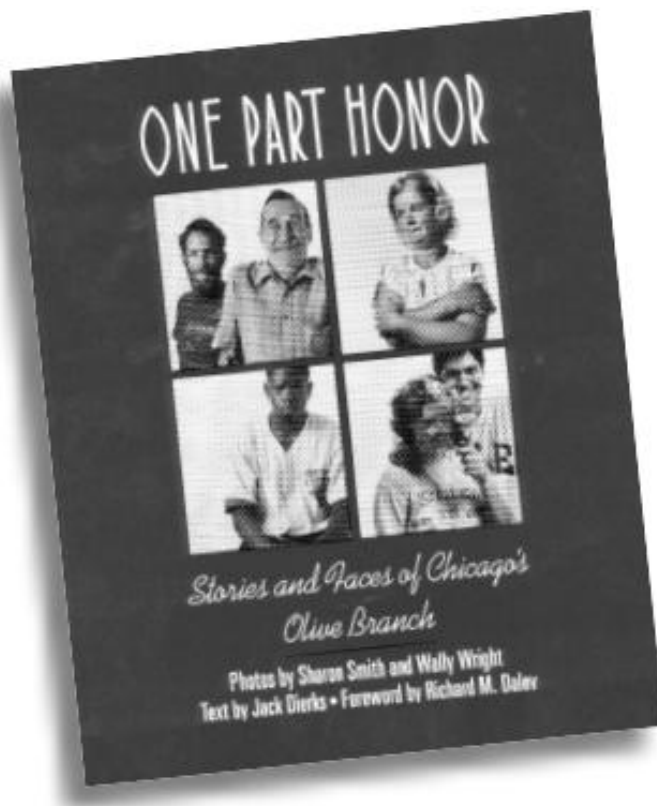


The OLIVE BRANCH

Established 1867

THE WORLD FOR JESUS



“If one part suffers, every part suffers with it:
If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”

I Corinthians 12:26

Chicago In The Exposition Year

No one who was there that day doubted that May 1, 1893, was a culminating triumph for Chicago. Of course, visitors to the World's Columbian Exposition fairgrounds had to sit through some high-toned oratory by Grover Cleveland, but that was soon over. With all eyes on the podium, and the band nearby ready to break into "Hail, Columbia," the golden telegraph key was handed to him. It took just a single press of the presidential finger to switch on the power in the network of tunnels underneath architect Daniel Burnham's 686-acre spread of neoclassical buildings and thoroughfares, starting up the gas engines, the turbines and dynamos, the textile and meat-packing apparatus in the Machinery Hall; the ponderous gears that operated George Washington Ferris' 265-foot "observation wheel," the half mile-long moving sidewalk, the circuits that lit up the 74 galleries of sculpture and paintings in the Fine Arts Building and the 6,000 carbon arc and the 120,000 incandescent lamps--more light bulbs than the whole city of Chicago had--which, if it did nothing else, left no doubt in anyone's mind that Mr. Edison's invention was here to stay.

The same could certainly be said for Chicago, as well, and all of this gala couldn't have been more fitting. It was time for the city to shrug off any remaining vestiges of those terrible three days twenty-two years before when the fabled O'Leary cow down on DeKoven Street started the blaze that had reduced the town's heart, if not its spirit, to ashes.

The rise from the rubble of 1871 had been swift and impressive. The metropolis now boasted a population of nearly 1.5 million, all drawn to the city that one English newspaper correspondent called the "concentrated essence of Americanism." Chicago was now not only the second most important urban area in the United States, but the fourth largest in the world. The sheer activity level was overwhelming. Carl Sandburg, an eighteen-year-old from Galesburg, Illinois, visited the area for the first time about then, and "walked miles and never got tired of the roar of the street, the trolley cars, the teamsters, the drays, buggies, surreys, and phaetons; the delivery wagons high with boxes, the brewery wagons piled with barrels, the one-horse and two horse hacks, sometimes a buckboard with a coachman in livery..."

All this bustle was fueled by money, and it seemed to be visible everywhere. The Fields, the McCormicks, the Swifts, and the Armours built impressive mansions, primarily in the Prairie Avenue district, which became known as the "street of the sifted few." Others developed land on "millionaire's row" on South Michigan Avenue. Potter Palmer shelled out hard cash for sand dunes and stagnant frog ponds on the North Side's neglected lake front, filled in the site, and in 1885 took possession of the finest house in Chicago, a turreted, balconied, minareted, porte-cochered granite castle, from which, at her base of operations in either the French drawing room, or the Greek or Japanese parlors, or the Spanish music room, or her Louis XVI bedroom, or perhaps from the sunken Turkish pool adjoining it, his wife Bertha reigned over the town's society. New York's Fifth Avenue had nothing on the Palmers. That was Chicago, Gem of the Prairie, in the Exposition year.

A few blocks to the west, probably closer than was comfortable for the first families of Prairie Avenue, was an area of dilapidated frame houses that were mere remnants of respectable workers' homes that had long since fallen into ruin. Now roofs gaped, walls sagged crazily, and vacant windows stared. Saloons had sprung up everywhere on the nearby streets.

Two women--one middle-aged, one younger--climbed the back stairs of a particularly ramshackle house in the winter of the Exposition year, picking their way carefully over ice, ashes, and every kind of filth. Someone had told them about the children there, and although they didn't know what they would find upstairs, they were used to sights of all kinds. They were from the Olive Branch Mission, not far away on Des Plaines Street, and when they weren't conducting religious services in the mission building or on the corner nearby, they spent every day visiting places just such as this, or the saloons themselves, or anywhere they felt they might be of help.

The women found four children in the unheated attic room. One was a little girl whimpering in bed under a ragged blanket. She had burned her leg badly from the knee to the foot, and nothing had been done to treat it, except for the application of some ink, considered a rough home remedy. It had done no good at all. The children's mother had been dead for a year; their father made a little money sharpening scissors on the streets. He was out there now. A hoarse, wheezy cough from a corner of the room revealed a hollow-eyed, two-year-old boy with a bad case of the croup. He had been given kerosene internally, and more had been smeared about his neck in such quantities that it had eaten a raw, angry sore all the way around.

The women shivered in the cold. Was there any food in the house? The oldest girl left the room and returned a moment later with a pot. In it were a dozen chicken heads that had been taken from a butcher's garbage can, and would be boiled for dinner with a few strands of macaroni. She was pleased with her find. The visitors got the impression that it was more than the children were used to. In another corner of the room was a big pile of cigar butts. The fourth child, a little boy, told one of the women that he picked them up out of the gutters and sold them for bread. He was quite proud of himself. He almost had enough for a loaf.

The two missionaries left and began searching from house to house, all down the block for someone who would at least bring in a clean cloth and bind up the girl's leg. They knocked on a lot of doors before they found a neighbor woman who agreed to stop by.

The next day they returned with a blanket, a few potatoes, some beans and apples, and a small sack of coal from the stocks that had been contributed to the mission. The day was colder. Much colder. And the woman who had promised to tend to the burned girl had never come at all.

This, too, was life in Chicago in the year of "The Fair."

The Need for Reform

*See them reeling down the street
Bloated faces, stagg'ring feet,
Hair unkempt and clothes awry,
Horror of the passer-by,
Are the fruits of Rum!*

-The Olive Branch Newspaper

A few, like Theodore Dreiser, saw and were able to appreciate both the heights and the depths. As a cub reporter, he covered fires, muggings, and "smash-and-grab" cases for the *Chicago Globe*, while absorbing material for the novels he would one day write. He called Chicago "a very bard of a city...singing of high deeds and high hopes, its heavy brogans buried deep in the mire of circumstance."

The Fourth Estate knew that the honorable Mayor Carter Harrison had a notoriously hands-off administration. Throughout his five terms, Harrison believed that prostitution, gambling, and their attendant vices were too ingrained in society for the law to do away with them. So they flourished. Just a few blocks from the fashionable near South Side lakefront was a notorious district known as the Levee, where alleys and dives were alive with harlots, addicts, sneak thieves, and strong-arm gangs. Hundreds of pimps organized into the Cadet's Protective Association, part of a slavery system that maintained stockades, "breaking in" dens, and classes in which young girls were forced into various perversions.

Olive Branch workers found the victims: young women tricked into slavery through mock marriages; girls of every race and color, no longer useful and dying of consumption or other diseases; an eleven-year-old who was sold to a man by her own mother.

The Levee had twenty-five-cent brothels as bad as anything in the nation, and it had the Everleigh Club, a fifty-room bordello mansion run by sisters Ada and Minna, who employed three separate orchestras to entertain customers. The Olive Branch workers were horrified that women would be a party to visiting such misery on young girls. Reporting to the State's Attorney that a French girl had been lured into slavery, a mission worker wrote, "How it adds fuel to the flame of resentment already kindled in our innermost souls to know that the house in which this fifteen-year-old girl was held is only a few doors from the mission home, and that the woman who is said to be carrying it on has a home in Glencoe, Illinois, where she is known by another name than the one by which she was indicted."

The Vice Commission estimated that girls were used up in a big time parlor in five years. Because of this limited life in what the vice lords referred to as "stock," they recruited victims continually. Supplying the large demand for new girls was the well-paying trade of the many procurers, who did their business not only in Chicago, but in large cities across America.

Kidnapping was a common method of recruitment, the Olive Branch workers knew. Their newspaper tells of a young victim named Pearl:

In September of the World's Fair year, she, then being only seventeen years, came into the city from her home to take the train for LaGrange, where she was employed as an artist. She concluded to take a streetcar ride to pass away the few hours before her train. Presently a fascinating young woman took her seat by Pearl's side. Her social chat and kind manners soon won Pearl's confidence....

In a burst of enthusiasm the young woman said, "Oh! If you will just stop at my home for a few moments, we will take a car and go to the park, and then I will accompany you to the train!"

Pearl thought that she was fortunate in finding such a pleasant companion and readily accepted the kindly invitation. They entered an elegantly furnished mansion, the door closed behind them, and Pearl found herself a prisoner. After five months of enforced prostitution, Pearl escaped one night when all of the inmates were intoxicated. The women's hearts went out to this girl, obviously from a good background. Why hadn't she gone home? Her mother must be frantic. "With a look of despair which no tongue or pen could describe," Pearl told them that she had contracted a disease during her slavery. Taking her stricken body home in that era would have brought shame on her family. She preferred that they mourn her for dead than know all she had been forced to do.

"God pity and save the victims of such injustice and cruelty," the report concluded.

Many pre-Prohibition Americans believed that drink was one of the most important causes, if not the sole cause, of poverty, indecency, and despair. Olive Branch Mission workers saw much to substantiate this theory. Their newspaper stories offered evidence: "good and virtuous women who link their lives to men who...drink (and then) desert their families, leaving them destitute," and child victims who sorrowed and outraged them. They wrote of Tommy, dying of wounds inflicted by his father, and saying, "I'm glad I'm going to die. I am too weak to help mother now. In Heaven the angels ain't going to call me a drunkard's child and make fun of my clothes." And of a ten-year-old boy whose feet were crushed by a runaway horse-drawn carriage. When he was told that his legs had been amputated, he worried about who would take care of his drunken father.

In the 1890s, there were nearly seven thousand saloons--one for every two hundred citizens--to serve a Chicago whose residents put away three million barrels of beer annually. By the turn of the century, *The Olive Branch* reported nine thousand saloons and pool rooms in Chicago, with 312 prostitution dens in one ward alone. Its editor decried that there were by comparison so few churches, and these, "mostly clustered in wealthier regions" of the city.

It was on the lowest economic level of society that alcohol abuse was most visible. The convergence of railway lines in Chicago brought more than thirty thousand homeless men to the streets each year during the 1890s, a number that was swelled by seasonal agricultural unemployment. Any national economic slowdown increased the number: during a depression that followed the panic of 1893, as many as seventy-five thousand derelicts filled every type of free sleeping space. They had become the city's most noticeable population segment.

In the summer they filled the parks and alleys and spaces under elevated tracks. "Hobo jungles" were a common sight along any railway line, and there was a large camp at the mouth of the Chicago River. Winter tested them more severely, and the winter of 1893-94 was the harshest in Chicago history. Homeless people died of cold and hunger only a few blocks west of the city's grand lakefront mansions and magnificent World's Fair buildings. As many as two thousand people a night bedded down in the corridors of City Hall. *The Olive Branch* articles told of ministering to drifters who had lost their limbs jumping to board trains, twelve-year-olds who rode stock car trains across the country, a rheumatic woman who had to sleep in a police station her first night out of the hospital. They were from all over the city and all over the world: "a poor Swede with a broken back," "a German woman abandoned with her children," "a Norwegian dying from consumption."

Most drifters satisfied themselves with boiled eggs and cheese and crackers at one of the local saloon's free lunch counters. Chroniclers of those times have called them a literal lifesaver: one estimated that they kept sixty thousand people from starvation every year. The Olive Branch women disagreed strongly, noting that their real purpose was to stimulate the appetite for drink. "The free lunches given out at saloons are very expensive to the one who goes in, costing him four or five dollars in one night for drinks for himself and others," they wrote. They reminded readers of the ultimate cost: over sixty thousand alcoholics died annually in the United States.

It was all part of the system in Chicago. *The Olive Branch* editors lamented that "this year, as in many previous, two saloon keepers in this ward ran for aldermen." But their greater outrage was for the good people who remained uninvolved. "We do not see how any Christian dare avoid the duties of citizenship. Only a moral coward will dare nurse and pamper his refined feelings and skulk away amidst kindred spirits while this terrible monster sweeps our best, our dearest into the very mouth of the pit. As we gaze into these awful hellholes that you 'amen' at the ballot box...our very souls cry out in indignation." The Olive Branch women, who ministered to those who suffered alcohol's terrible consequences, had no use for refined Christian men who declared that "you cannot keep the grace of God in your heart and have anything to do with politics." Such Christianity was not suitable for Chicago.

An Enthusiasm For Service

"Be not simply good, but be good for something."

-The Olive Branch Newspaper, 1896

Chicago itself was a phenomenon that grew out of the aftermath of the Civil War, that conflagration that changed so much in American life. The war had devastated the South and, by speeding up the process of industrialization and urbanization of recently arrived immigrant groups in the North, had created massive problems of crowding and deprivation in cities like Chicago.

War work acquainted many Americans with the necessity of aiding those who suffered. For many women, war relief work was an emancipating experience. It made some rueful, after the fighting had ended, to return once again to the management of households. Indeed, that was impossible for the many whose husbands, or the young men who might have married them, had been casualties. That generation of women carried forward into postwar America the enthusiasm for service that had been awakened between 1861 and 1865. They were the foremothers and the teachers of those who came after, who were to make the Progressive Era famous for selfless women who devoted their lives to aiding the unfortunate.

Mary Everhart was one of these, although she would never describe herself in such glorified terms. She was born on a farm near Lickingville, Pennsylvania, in February 1853, the granddaughter of a Scottish Methodist preacher. She had grown up with a strong determination to plot her own course in life, a quality that was immediately tested in a conflict with her father, who felt that her ambition to teach was encroaching on man's work. His approval was won grudgingly, but she settled into the work with enthusiasm, and taught for twenty years before moving to Chicago in 1890 to take a position in the Industrial Home for Children. The superintendent there thought he detected in her a potential for mission work, and suggested she help out at Mrs. Rachael Bradley's center on Wells Street.

Mrs. Bradley had started up a Saturday sewing class for the neighborhood poor back in 1867 in the Free Methodist Church on Morgan Street. She felt that the class didn't provide enough opportunity to minister to the needy, so she decided to add Bible teaching to the activities and located an old hall on Wells Street for that purpose. In the large single room that served as both working and living quarters, she preached the love of God in the midst of Chicago's slums for twenty-four years.

In 1891, the mission moved to Des Plaines Street, just three blocks south of Haymarket Square, where eleven had been killed and over a hundred wounded during an anarchists' labor demonstration on May 4, 1886. The mission's name was changed to the Olive Branch Mission, not long after Mary Everhart came to help the older woman out on Christmas, the busiest day of the calendar.

Mary found the once tall and regal Mrs. Bradley in terrible circumstances. "She was lodged by a stranger on the third floor of a rooming house, sick, oh, so sick! The few pennies I carried to her from friends were all she had to supply her with food and medicine," her protégé later wrote. "Although it meant death by inches, with her iron will and her tender loving heart, she pushed on the battle" to keep the mission going.

A year and a half after the helper came, Mrs. Bradley sold all the mission equipment to Mary with the stipulation that, if she recovered, she would buy it back. She did not. On August 30, 1893, with the World's Fair in full swing, Mary Everhart, became the new owner and superintendent, reporting sadly that "now others not so capable are taking on the work of the Olive Branch."

At this time, institutions like the Olive Branch Mission did not have a long history. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the American attitude toward poverty was an amalgam of two conflicting views: Calvinism taught that poverty was a manifestation of God's will, perhaps not wholly comprehensible, but a blessing of sorts, for it inspired the rich to acts of personal charity and led the poor onto paths of patience and gratitude. Opposed to this, the American experience suggested that poverty was unnecessary.

Most nineteenth-century Americans combined these views into the following belief: Poverty ought to be unnecessary in the United States, but people's varying abilities and virtues made poverty impossible to do away with. "For the poor always ye have with you." (John 12:8) This creed attributes destitution to man rather than God. The favored were obligated to aid the unfortunate, but popular thinking emphasized the responsibility of each individual to look out for his own interests, promoting a see-no-evil attitude.

The belief that personal failings caused poverty retained a popular following long after the disappearance of the economic circumstances that seemed to give it validity. It was particularly difficult for nineteenth-century Americans to accept that, in a complex economy, individuals were no longer the independent entities they once seemed to be, that an impersonal element had begun to operate in the economic area, and that it was increasingly apparent that people suffered as often from the venality and blunders of others as from their own shortcomings.

Mary Everhart changed her views on these matters during her work with prostitutes. "I once believed that almost everyone of this class had deliberately chosen this life, but I now know that at least 75 percent were unwilling victims ...snared, trapped, bought, and sold" or desperate to provide for their children.

"It is an alarming fact that many of our fallen sisters have become such through the cruel hand of oppression and the lack of timely aid and sympathy. Many of the girls who work in our factories and are employed as clerks in our stores...find their income inadequate." They become tempted "to sell their virtue to supply the lack, never dreaming of becoming public prostitutes," Mary wrote, dismayed that it usually became their fate. A number of Protestant clergy began to devote attention to this emerging awareness, and to the problems arising from rapid industrial urban growth. The sermons that grew out of their efforts were designed to make their middle-class congregations realize their responsibility for justice and see that the conditions under which men and women labored, and the circumstances in which they spent their lives, posed moral questions requiring every Christian's attention.

Mary Everhart also posed these questions, and answered them in *The Olive Branch* Newspaper, which she started in 1894:

Who is responsible (for a woman prostituting herself to support her five children)?

If the Christian world were more like Him who went about the visiting of the afflicted, relieving the oppressed, and binding up broken hearts, there would be fewer such testimonies as [this woman's]. We make no excuses for sin, but insomuch as we fold our arms and turn a deaf ear to those crying for help, just ready to plunge headlong into ruin and utter despair, we are responsible for their sin.

Is it enough to gather the children of Christian and moral parents into our churches and teach them the truths of Christianity?

No!

For the most part, though, Mary and her colleagues didn't concern themselves with the day's social and theological theories. There was work to be done, and their focus was on how best to serve the incredible needs in their midst. Their mission was simple and practical, as was their faith: "A religion that feeds the bodies as well as the souls of men, where workers go into the slums, visit the needy sick, scrub their floors, bathe their bodies, give them food, watch with them at night, clothe them, and, besides pray with them and get them saved, must commend itself to all sincere lovers of the human race."

Their lives were never simple. The neighborhood where Mary Everhart took it upon herself to work was wretched. At one time there were thirteen saloons in the block where the mission was located, and 337 within three-quarters of a mile. Every other house on the block was a brothel. The police warned Mary that the alley adjacent to the mission was the most dangerous in the city after dark. Their building was a ramshackle wreck, always in danger of being condemned by the Health Department. It was infested with rats, which customarily crawled into the walls to die. Mission workers burned apple parings to try and get rid of the odor, unsuccessfully.

In spite of the grim surroundings--or, in another sense, because of them--Mary Everhart's work was pressing, and her typical week was hectic. There were services at the Olive Branch Mission every evening. Workers and converts met at the mission at 7 P.M. for prayer, gathering in the one large room that held two hundred people. Singing was a big part of the service, with Mary and another one of the sisters--both of whom had good voices--leading the congregation. An appointed leader addressed the audience. Then converts told their stories of redemption, and there was an altar service. Because the congregations were made up largely of alcoholics, precautions had to be taken: those who went to the altar took their hats and other belongings; otherwise, they might be stolen while they prayed.

Then a meal was served on long tables. And at some time during the evening, if the weather permitted, they would all walk half a block to the corner of Madison and Des Plaines streets for an open-air meeting.

Each Wednesday afternoon the workers visited the Cook County Hospital. They also frequently visited the state penitentiary in Joliet, sometimes getting prisoners released in their custody. On Sunday mornings, they visited inmates at the neighborhood police station. On the way home they would hold a service in the lodging house where the mission workers lived, and after the noon meal, there would be a Sunday school for both children and adults. In addition, there were meetings to provide ongoing spiritual help and to encourage attendees towards a moral life. There were all-day services on Christmas and Thanksgiving and often on other holidays as well. For years the workers ran a live-in rescue home for abandoned and orphaned children, located three blocks from the mission.

There were also continual rounds of visitation in homes, lodging houses, and saloons, which were considered important targets of their ministry. (A local dive offered ten-dollar rewards to anyone who would draw a mission convert back into drinking.) Usually two of the women walked in together for mutual protection. Mary Everhart once stopped by forty-five saloons in one day, and for a time she conducted a weekly gospel service in one of the worst of them, with the owner's permission. The police warned her that someday she would be murdered in a saloon for the "ten-cent collection" boxes she always carried. It didn't happen, although she was once threatened by a saloon owner who felt she was ruining his business. Another time, she incurred deep facial cuts and bruises after being chased and run down by cyclists.

Back at the mission there was food and donated clothing to tally and distribute, and the monthly newspaper to edit and mail. The newspaper pleaded for twenty-five cents a year for subscriptions: "I think many times it would be much easier to pay twenty-five cents to read about this work in the slums and dens in the city than to do the work. Which will you do? Don't say 'neither.'"

The Olive Branch became a valuable documentation of ministering to Chicago's indigent. By tireless selling of newspaper subscriptions and her summertime church camp visits, Mary extended awareness and participation in the Olive Branch work all over the Midwest, and eventually throughout the United States.

There were also great piles of letters to answer, meals to cook and serve, laundry to wash, and the endless task of keeping the household clean in an area blackened by the smoke of coal fires. And the purely mundane:

Dear readers:

When you pluck a fowl, please singe it too. You see, when they come to us frozen, it is almost impossible to singe them.

We are having trouble with moths in this intense August heat in our crowded quarters, so please save all clothing donations until October.

We have to pay twenty-four cents a pound for butter. Please can someone send us a five-quart pail?

Most of her challenges were more serious, like the time she and a co-worker, searching for a young girl in need, found themselves in a basement opium dive in a dark, filthy alley: "We were obliged to go in or be defeated in our purpose. The only light that could be seen in that dungeon was from tapers lighted for opium smoking. Two beds held both men and women gathered to smoke freely. Such a burden came upon us for the souls of these poor girls in the jaws of hell that we burst into tears, and between sobs and cries told them ...how our loving Savior could bring them up out of this horrible pit."

As traumatic as this first visit was for the missionaries, they returned several times, "hoping to reach those girls so hardened, so stubborn, so skeptical."

Eventually, the police “began pulling the opium joints,” Mary wrote, “so their door became closed to us and we lost sight of these girls forever.”

It was all in a day's work for Mary, who let neither the general viciousness of the neighborhood or her own bad health deter her. She felt that God was employing her for his own purposes, and she would not falter. “He can use a worm to thresh a mountain,” she was fond of saying.

Mary became ill in 1895, then two years later she and Jennie Clark and Viletta Dalrymple were stricken with “la grippe.” Viletta was sent away to recover from a diseased lung; a year later Jennie, still ill, was sent to California to recover; and Mary struggled on.

During these months of sickness, Mary's newspaper pieces sometimes revealed discouragement, even desperation: “We need helpers. I have toiled almost night and day for years, but I cannot toil on as I have done, and we cannot have any more help unless we have more room. We need a building more than you who live in the pure air and bright sunshine can know. While it seems I cannot regain my usual strength, I can do a little of the business, and the work goes on.”

Yet she knew her own antidote: “This is from real life ... and my moral is plain. When your hearts are weary and the way seems rough and hard, go and find other hearts more full of care than your own and you will soon forget all of your own troubles in trying to comfort others; you will find that 'it is more blessed to give than to receive.' (Acts 20:35)”

Her energy was renewed and her passions fueled especially by injustices to women and children. She was dismayed that, by 1897, “there are only thirteen police stations in Chicago where women can be taken, and 31,945 women and children were under matrons' care (in them) in one year.” She was outraged at finding a child dying from injuries that his father had inflicted in a drunken rage: “He lived in a Christian land, in a country that takes great care to pass laws to protect sheep and diligently legislate over its game. Would that children were as precious as brutes and birds!”

Whatever her own circumstances, Mary always found time to take Sunday School children to the park. When she was trying to raise \$20,000 and struggling to pay the rent, she found space in her newspaper to thank children who had sent her pennies: “Many times when the burden seemed too heavy to carry, some token of your interest, love, and sacrifice has put new courage in our hearts and new strength in our bodies.”

She was superintendent of the mission for thirty-five years. The physical needs of the indigent, an ever-present concern, took much of Mary's time and energy, but she saw her primary task as nurturing the souls of those in despair. During her tenure, religious conversions averaged one a day.

Mary Everhart died in 1928. Fortunately, a firm cadre of dedicated colleagues--some of whom had first come to the mission back in the 1890s, like Katie V. Hall--had developed to carry on the work. Carry on they did, much as before. They began a school for training urban missionaries, where teachers who were mostly pastors donating their time without pay, provided study and practical experience. But the mission's primary goal, religious guidance and feeding, clothing, and loving the poor in the area west of Chicago's Loop, stayed in the forefront.

Mary Everhart's vision for training youth for urban ministry has become today's Olive Branch Mission - Division for Higher Education and Advanced Urban Studies, with 20 participating colleges and over 1000 graduate and under-graduate students attending per year.

Wars, depressions, and unrest have come and gone, as have social, political, and theological theories about poverty's causes and cures, but the Olive Branch remains Chicago's oldest (also the oldest in the United States) continuously running mission. For over 138 years, its workers have carried on, perhaps never having heard Mary Everhart's dictum, but sharing it nonetheless: “A religion that doesn't cost anything is not the kind the good Samaritan had.”