

Wisdom-Martin sees new national role as ‘an act of obedience’

August 8, 2016

DALLAS—When friends approached Sandy Wisdom-Martin about being considered as the next executive director of national Woman’s Missionary Union, she recalled having “a long list of valid reasons” why she should not.



Sandy Wisdom-Martin found joy in her role as executive director-treasurer of Woman’s Missionary Union of Texas and grew to love the staff. She was happy in her role as executive director-treasurer of Woman’s Missionary Union of Texas and loves the people with whom she works. Her husband, Frank, is a hospice social worker who finds deep satisfaction in his ministry. Her daughter, Hannah, starts her senior year of high school this month. Wisdom-Martin didn’t see herself moving to a national post in Alabama.

However, one factor trumped all her reservations. A long time ago, she

said, "I put my 'yes' on the table" in terms of going wherever God leads.

"My mind never changed about the role with national WMU, but my heart changed about what it means to live in total surrender to the Father," she said. "The Father had to do a great deal of work in my life through the process. In the end, it became an act of obedience."

A family decision

It also became a family decision, she added. She recalled her husband saying, "If this is God's will for our family, I'm in."

"No one in their right mind would move a child her senior year of school," Wisdom-Martin said. "But our daughter said she would if this is what God wanted for us."

The national WMU executive board unanimously elected Wisdom-Martin as executive-director treasurer at a called meeting in Birmingham, Ala., July 29-30. She assumes her new responsibilities Oct. 15, and the rest of her family already is in the process of moving to Birmingham, to enable Hannah to begin classes at her new school.

'A spiritual journey'

"The search for Sandy was, above all, a spiritual journey," said Joy Bolton, who chaired the search committee for national WMU.

"For each member of the search committee, the process was deeply spiritual. While we employed good business practices in screening, interviewing, etc., we were, above all, seeking the one that the Lord had chosen for us. God was faithful. We sought him first, and in finding him, we also found Sandy."

Helped bring healing

Wisdom-Martin, who served previously as women's missions and ministries director for the Illinois Baptist State Association, arrived at Texas WMU in 2010 at a challenging time.

An executive director-treasurer resigned, the organization's executive committee summarily dismissed an interim leader before her contract ended, and several longtime staff members resigned or took early retirement. The organization brought in an intentional interim executive director for about two years.

"God brought Sandy to WMU of Texas for 'such a time as this,' to help us heal," Texas WMU President Shirley McDonald said. "Sandy exemplifies servant leadership. ... She will do a great job at national WMU. Everybody loves her."

McDonald, a member of Greens Creek Baptist Church in Dublin, praised Wisdom-Martin as "one of the best things to happen to WMU of Texas" and an innovator who launched multiple hands-on missions action programs.

In consultation with the Texas WMU executive committee, McDonald will appoint an interim executive director. The organization's personnel committee will serve as search committee to find Wisdom-Martin's successor as executive director-treasurer.

Major goals for Texas WMU

"One of the major goals I had in mind when coming to WMU of Texas was to bring unity," Wisdom-Martin said. "The organization we love had some difficult years. I believe we have made great progress."

"Another goal was to bring financial stability," she added. Assets doubled during her tenure, but she insists Texas WMU remains "a long way from being financially secure."

One “unexpected opportunity” arose after the BGCT Executive Board sold the Baptist Building at 333 N. Washington to Baylor University for its Louise Herrington School of Nursing, she noted. Since Texas WMU occupied offices at the Baptist Building, the organization had to relocate, moving to 10325 Brockwood Rd. in northeast Dallas.

“Looking back, we can see where God led us each step of the way,” she said.

Highlights of time in Texas



Sandy Wisdom-Martin developed relationships not only with the Texas WMU volunteers who worked on building projects in the Rio Grande Valley, but also with local residents who helped. Reflecting on highlights of her time at Texas WMU, Wisdom-Martin noted the organization raised its profile and increased awareness through missions engagement and involvement in ministries, such as building homes for low-income families in partnership with Buckner International and Rio Grande Valley Baptist Association.

“In a few months, women will build their sixth home,” she said.

Also, Texas WMU converted an old bus into a mobile store for WorldCrafts, the WMU fair-trade initiative that helps impoverished women in developing nations build sustainable businesses.

Texas WMU used the “rolling WorldCrafts store” to sell more than

\$100,000 in products while teaching shoppers about fair trade and the missionaries who work with artisans, she noted.

The women's missions organization also obtained a truck and generator for its "Suds of Love Laundry Unit" that will enable WMU volunteers to work in partnership with Texas Baptist Men disaster relief.

Also during Wisdom-Martin's time as Texas WMU leader, the organization's board of directors achieved greater diversity, with 40 percent non-Anglo representation; hired a full-time consultant for Christian Women's Job Corps and Christian Men's Job Corps; and saw a record number of young women serve as National Acteens Panelists.

Listen and learn

When she moves into her new post at national WMU, Wisdom-Martin said, her first goal is to listen and learn.

"The mission will not change," she said. "Woman's Missionary Union challenges Christian believers to understand and be radically involved in the mission of God. Yet, every generation must find their way to use the best methods available to carry out the mission in their current context.

"Beyond listening and learning, I will want to help the organization transition through this period of change. Change happens, yet change is always difficult for organizations, because organizations are made of people who have invested their lives in the ministry. I will want to walk with managers to help facilitate the 'soft' side of change in a way that values everyone in the organization."

Wisdom-Martin acknowledged WMU needs to raise its profile among rank-and-file members of Baptist churches.

"We have challenges, to be sure," she said. "It's hard to cut through the

vast levels of noise to get our message out. The future will demand higher visibility and more options. I find that when people understand what we do, they value us.”