

Trick-or-Treat for **UNICEF**

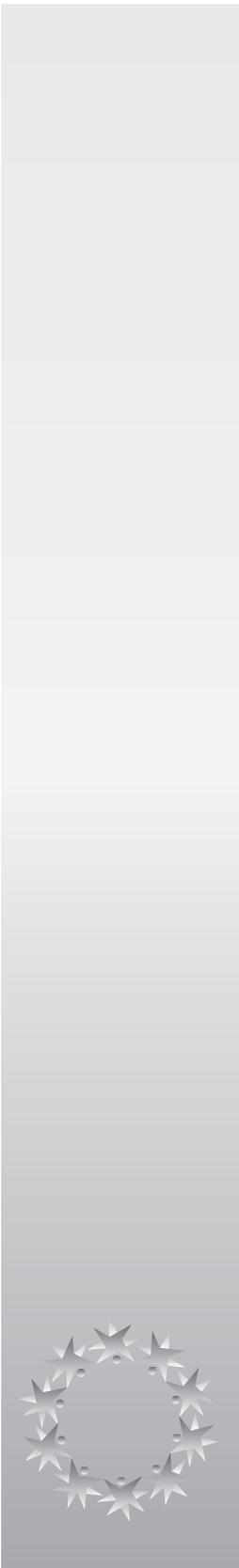
There it was—a real live cow, leading a parade of children costumed in the native dress of many countries right down the middle of busy Market Street in downtown Philadelphia. The cow was arrayed too- with banners that read “One cent will buy 20 glasses of milk”. Most onlookers were probably amused and intrigued, but for Mary Emma Allison, the parade was more than just interesting – it was an answer to a prayer.

The Allison family had moved to Philadelphia several years earlier from Stanley, North Dakota, where the Rev. Clyde Allison had pastored a small church. Now he was serving as the editor of Youth Fellowship and Junior High Kits for Westminster Press, the publisher for the Board of Christian Education of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. In the aftermath of World War II, Europe and Asia lay ravaged. Church World Service was mobilizing a massive effort to meet the needs of thousands who were homeless and without an income. When Clyde Allison saw the relief agency’s long list of needed items, he had an idea. In the Junior High Kits materials for 1948, he included a Halloween Sunday school project: children could collect worn-out shoes to meet the urgent needs of both Dutch shoemakers who needed the repair work to jumpstart the revitalization of their industry and the refugee children who needed shoes. That Halloween, Presbyterian children went door-to-door and collected tens of thousands of shoes in bags they decorated themselves.

In 1949, the Junior High kit materials suggested collecting soap. But in the meantime, an urgent need arose for children’s overcoats. Greek refugee children had been forced out of their homes and into camps in the mountains by a civil war with only the lightweight summer clothing on their backs. So a plea went out for overcoats to be collected on Halloween along with the soap.

But by 1950, word came from Church World Service that the war relief organizations were disbanding. The last of the refugee camps had been closed, and there was no longer a need for collecting shoes or overcoats or soap. While this was good news for war recovery, it seemed to signal the end of a very successful Halloween project for children. Yet children in many impoverished areas of the world were still in desperate need, and the idea of children helping other children was just too powerful to go away. Mary Emma Allison assured her husband that they would find a new avenue to keep this project alive.

Out on the street in Philadelphia with her three young children in tow, Mary Emma followed the cow parade to its end inside the Wanamaker department store. There she met Ms. Gertrude Ely, a personal friend of Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, the U.S. Ambassador to the UN. Ms. Ely had organized the parade to raise funds for UNICEF. With contact information in hand, Mrs. Allison returned home to give her husband the good news: she had found the perfect organization for the project of children helping other children.



Following a trip to New York to meet with officials for UNICEF, Clyde Allison arrived home with the joyous news that Halloween collections would continue. Mrs. Allison had one request from her husband the editor-in-chief: she would be the author of the article for the Junior High Kit (read the article on pgs. 16-17).

From the start, Trick or Treat for UNICEF was a phenomenal success. Shortly after Halloween staff at UNICEF headquarters called the Presbyterian Board of Christian Education to thank them. Never had UNICEF received so much money from a single event, and they wanted to expand the program. Clyde Allison had by this time resigned to spend more time writing instead of managing. The new editor, Nevil Kendall, told UNICEF staff that if they really wanted to understand Trick or Treat for UNICEF then they would need to speak with the Allisons. A group from UNICEF visited the Allison's home in Hatboro, Pennsylvania, where they learned that the program was easy to replicate and worked equally well with small or large groups.

A few months later Clyde Allison got a call asking him to come to the New York City UNICEF headquarters to meet Mrs. Roosevelt. UNICEF was establishing a permanent organization to develop and support Trick or Treat for UNICEF, and Clyde Allison was invited to head the effort for faith-based organizations on a volunteer basis.



What inspired the Reverend and Mrs. Allison? According to their son, Monroe Allison, his father noted that when his very small children went out collecting candy the first time, he and his wife began to ponder the experience of trick or treating. The pageantry and excitement of dressing up in costumes was certainly fun for children, but what did it really produce? The evidence was right there on the table. It was a bag of ginger snaps, candy corn, apples and candy bars of all kinds. So Mrs. Allison asked her husband, "Why can't kids collect food for starving children instead?" That comment was the mustard seed from which Trick or Treat for UNICEF grew – a project whereby children have the opportunity to grow as disciples of Christ through helping other children.

In this year of the sixtieth anniversary of Trick or Treat for UNICEF, the Allison family hopes that every Presbyterian church and organization will answer the call to reaffirm this important part of our Presbyterian heritage. Perhaps this Halloween, as in 1950, UNICEF will contact the Presbyterian Church (USA) to offer thanks and to ask how Presbyterian children could raise so much money. And perhaps we can say: "We do this because we are called as disciples – adults and children alike – to bring good news to all those places where children are in need."

— Based on an account by Monroe Allison