

Harriet Bedell, Deaconess and Missionary  
Lesser Feasts and Fasts, page 58

Harriet Bedell was born in Buffalo, New York on March 19th, 1875. Inspired by an Episcopal missionary, she enrolled as a student at the New York Training School for Deaconesses, where she was instructed in religion, missions, teaching, and health. She then became a missionary-teacher among the Cheyenne at the Whirlwind Mission in Oklahoma.

In 1916, Bedell was sent to Stevens Village, Alaska, where she was set apart as a deaconess in 1922. She also served as a teacher and nurse at St. John's in the Wilderness at Allakaket, just 40 miles south of the Arctic Circle, from which she sometimes traveled by dogsled to remote villages. During her last years in Alaska, Bedell opened a boarding school.

In 1932, hearing about the plight of the Seminoles in Florida, Bedell used her own salary to reopen a mission among the Mikasuki Indians. There, she worked to revive some of their traditional crafts: doll-making, basket-weaving, and intricate patchwork designs. The arts and crafts store that they established to sell their handicrafts improved the economy of the Blades Cross Mission. Though officially forced to retire at age 63, Bedell continued her ministry of health care, education, and economic empowerment until 1960 when Hurricane Donna wiped out her mission.

Active into her eighties, Deaconess Bedell drove an average of 20,000 miles per year during her ministry. She was one of the most popular writers in the national Episcopal mission periodical, *The Spirit of Missions*. Bedell won the respect of indigenous people through her compassion and respect for their way of life and beliefs. While active in ministry among the Cheyenne, she was eventually adopted into the tribe and given the name "Bird Woman." The Diocese of Southwest Florida has long celebrated Harriet Bedell Day on January 8th, the anniversary of her death in 1969.

The Collect for Harriet Bedell

*Holy God, fill us with compassion and respect for all people, and empower us for the work of ministry whether near or far away; that like thy servant Harriet Bedell, we may how forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*