



## *The United States Christian Commission*

In the fall of 1861, with the support of the Lincoln administration and the War Department, Protestant clergymen along with the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) formed the United States Christian Commission. The Christian Commission was a civilian "army" of men and women, that sought to improve the moral and spiritual lives of Union soldiers. Many of them lived in or near the army camps, passing out religious tracts and Testaments, organizing worship services, acting as nurses in the hospitals, and doing their best to spread the Gospel.

In addition to spreading the Good News the Christian Commission also promoted literacy by purchasing copies of "the better class of magazines" and sending them to the soldiers. In the permanent camps, they established free reading rooms, and in a number of these newspapers from back home were kept on file.

Chapters of the United States Christian Commission formed in every major city in the North. Supported by men, women, and children throughout the North, these entirely volunteer organizations also raised

money, collected donations, and made clothing and other goods for the soldiers.

Delegates traveled to the hospitals and to the front to distribute food, clothing, medicine, and stationery supplies. Such visits provided the soldiers with a connection to their loved ones back home. Writing materials and postage stamps were furnished free of charge to the soldiers, and the agents never ceased urging the men to write home and to send home a considerable part of their pay.

Concerned about the physical health of soldiers and especially the abuse of alcohol, the Commission operated a number of coffee-wagons in direct competition with the sutlers (traveling merchants), who frequently sold liquor. The Commission also established "special diet-kitchens" for the sick and convalescent.

During the War, the Commission raised more than 6.25 million dollars in money and supplies. At the end of the war, the Commission donated their surplus goods to the regular army.