



Fellowship of the Least Coin

PRAYER CONCERNS 2009

These prayer concerns are provided for participants in the Fellowship of the Least Coin. Each time they pray for justice, peace and reconciliation, they set aside one "least coin" as a tangible token toward their prayers being answered. We invite you to pray with us and put your least coins to work with those from around the world. For more information, visit our FLC pages at <http://www.wicc.org/programmevents/Fellowship/index.html>.

JANUARY: Global Food Crisis

When we pray for our daily bread, are we content, or is that only the beginning of our wish list?

"The Lord's Prayer highlights that having enough to eat is, and has always been, central to the Christian idea of a world shaped by justice and mercy," observed Sushant Agrawal, Director of the Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) in India. "If God's will was done, no one would go hungry."

At present, 854 million people – one person in every eight – are hungry, and the rapid increase in food prices may add

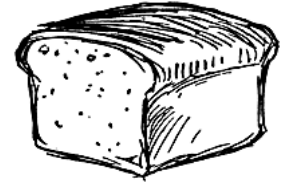
another 100 million people to that count.

While the affluent of the world are able to stockpile food staples against future price increases, the most vulnerable have no protection against price fluctuations. Yet food prices in the poorest parts of the world have increased as much as 300%.

The food crisis is rooted in international financial, trade, and agricultural policies. Human actions that are driven by greed have exacerbated poverty and hunger. As Christians, we are called to resist the economy of excessiveness and promote God's economy, an economy of having enough.

Nearly 500 years ago, Martin Luther explained:

"When you ask for your 'daily bread', you ask for everything that is necessary in order to have and enjoy daily bread and on the contrary, protection against everything that interferes with enjoying it." People of faith need to take action to change systems that hinder people from having the food they need to survive.



Sources: World Council of Churches, Action by Churches Together.

FEBRUARY: Papua New Guinea

On March 6, 2009, people will gather in 170 countries around the world to celebrate World Day of Prayer written by the committee from Papua New Guinea. It is a land of incredible beauty and variety, the "land of the unexpected".

PNG is a matrilineal society, where the mother is entrusted with the guardianship of her family. Even though women have this status, their literacy rate is only 51 percent. Violence against women is common and employment opportunities are limited.

PNG is currently experiencing rapid population growth and has the highest reported HIV/AIDS cases in the region. As well, Papua New Guinea is a country of destina-



tion for trafficked women and children from Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and China. PNG does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, and lacks victim protection

services or even a procedure to identify victims of trafficking. The country relies on assistance from Australia to keep out illegal cross-border activities.

This year, during World Day of Prayer, we pray for the women of PNG and for improved access to education and employment. We pray that the government will strengthen and enforce laws that protect all from enslavement and trafficking. We pray that world governments will take action to stop global warming which threatens vulnerable countries like Papua New Guinea.

Marilyn Fortin, a WICC Council member, is on the executive of the WDP International Committee. She lives in Morden, Manitoba.

MARCH: Supporting our Sisters in Spirit

Time and time again, statistics show that women who belong to racial minorities are over-represented as victims of violence. In 2004, the Native Women's Association of Canada launched the national Sisters in Spirit campaign to raise public awareness of the more than 500 Indigenous women who have gone missing in communities across Canada.

These stolen women are our Sisters. We must remember our Sisters from the time of

their birth to the time of their death. For so many of our Sisters, words were placed on them that influenced their entire lives.

Do we, as Sisters, remember what we have said to little girls, young women, women of colour, immigrant women, or women without homes? Are our words uplifting to their Spirits? Are our words meant to make the Sisters feel like they are wanted in this world? And, have we made a place for a Sister among us whatever

their circumstance?

Please remember to pray with an open heart and mind that our mouths and tongues would not be an instrument for making any Sister an Other.

Jillian Harris is a WICC Council member. She lives in Duncan, BC.



APRIL: Democratic Republic of the Congo

The people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo need our help. In recent months, more than 200,000 people have been driven from their homes, and murder and rape are rife. The United Nations peacekeeping mission is in Congo to keep a peace that has fallen apart.

As this article was being written (at the end of November), families were running for their lives, stuck between the brutal violence of both the rebels and the Congolese army, without food or shelter – their only refuges are crowded camps which now face epidemics of disease.



The recent clashes between General Nkunda's militias and the Congolese army are the latest in a place where the popula-

tion has been attacked and terrorised for years by armed groups. Over five million people have been killed. It's been termed "Africa's world war", with Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia all getting involved. The fighting is fed by a lethal war economy based on the extraction of minerals such as coltan, cobalt, diamonds and gold, to which we're all connected through the worldwide market.

Pray for the people of eastern Congo, for the families made homeless by war and the victims of violence and rape.

Source: Avaaz (<http://www.avaaz.org>)

MAY: Women and the Justice System

The Ministry of the Attorney General and the Ministry of Public Safety and the Solicitor General recognize the need to address the response of the Justice System to a problem of escalating concern: violence and the miscarriage of justice against women and children... The policy emphasizes the need for arrest and rigorous prosecution of offences... and attempts to balance the demand of the criminal justice system with the interest of the victim.

This information, taken from the internet, would seem to indicate that women today, when seeking help from the Justice System, would be heard and guided through a process enabling them and their children to move forward with their lives, confident that those who had hurt them would be

brought to justice. From the experience of close friends and family, this simply isn't so. The process is slow and often flawed.

A recent incident in the news tells of a woman who was repeatedly abused, mentally and physically. Her partner received a sentence of less than two years. He was not given jail time, but permitted to go to another province to work and report in daily. Justice served? I think not!

We need to keep pressure on our governments to put more emphasis on justice. We need to know the platforms of our politicians and vote accordingly. More than anything, we need to show support to women and children who are victims of violence.

Let us pray: God, our loving friend and



protector, fold your sheltering and healing arms around those who suffer physical and emotional abuse on a daily basis. Instill into the hearts of those who formulate our laws the wisdom and compassion to know the true path of justice and act upon it. Help us all to be conscious of what is happening in our homes, our neighbourhoods and our world, and grant us the grace to reach out to those who need us. Amen.

Inez Penney is a WICC Council Member. She lives in Moreton's Harbour, Newfoundland.

JUNE: The Republic of Haiti

The Republic of Haiti is a Caribbean nation comprising the western one-third of the island of Hispaniola. It is one of the poorest countries in the world. Haitians have suffered from years of political instability and economic hardship. Eighty per cent of Haitians live under the poverty line.

Only 28% of the land is arable and suitable for the agricultural production of coffee, mangoes, bananas, sugar cane, rice, beans, and sorghum. The price of rice and beans, their two staple foods, has doubled in the past year. The daily wage for most Haitians is between \$1 - \$2; they rarely eat more than one meal per day. Some women make and sell mud cookies to supplement their meager diets and income. These cookies cause parasitic illnesses, especially in children.

Over 98% of the mountains and hillsides in Haiti are deforested. The local people use the wood for fuel to cook their food; they



have no alternative cooking fuel. The severe deforestation has led to devastating rock and mud slides during periods of heavy rain. Villages and shantytowns built at the base of these mountains are often destroyed.

Four hurricanes during a one-month period in the summer of 2008 compounded Haiti's already dire economic situation. Over a thousand people were killed in the flooding, and one million people were left

homeless. Crops were destroyed and roads and bridges washed away. Wells were contaminated, and food continues to be in short supply. Haitian President Rene Preval said, in his plea for international aid after the hurricanes, "Haiti is not just on the brink of disaster; it is over the brink."

So what can we as Canadian women do to help alleviate the suffering of our Haitian sisters? Collectively we can pray with them and for them. As individuals, and as caring communities, we can put prayer into action. We can share our knowledge, and use our creative talents to fundraise for different projects to help Haitian women and families. The possibilities are endless. Let us pray and work in solidarity with the women in Haiti, offering them hope for a brighter future.

Pam Forster chairs Canadians Helping Haitian Children, and lives in Morden, Manitoba. For more information, visit www.Sionfonds.org.

JULY: Update on Paraguay

Paraguay's new president, Fernando Lugo, assumed office in August 2008. For the first time in 65 years it was not the traditional Colorado (red) Party in office. Lugo had been Bishop of the Catholic Church in Paraguay, actively concerned for the poorer population in the country. He gave up his Religious mandate in 2007 and formed an alliance of various smaller parties around his position, and received the greatest percentage of the votes in a surprisingly peaceful election in April – thanks to a praying Christian Community worldwide!

Lugo's aims are to improve the situation for the poor and landless. There have been tensions for long periods between land-



owners and landless, with demonstrations and vandalism, such as burning crops. In an interview with Red Guarani (TV) at the time of 60 days in office, the president stated that he would not act against the right of

property, but take into account the right for property for the rural population and seek a consensus of both sides.

What the people in Paraguay want is: Work; Help for children who are living on the street; Education; Health; Security.

In respect to health, the summer season (December to February) brings mosquitoes, which in turn can accelerate the spread of diseases such as Dengue Fever. There is as yet no immunization for this illness. As in most parts of the world, AIDS is also on the increase in our country. Treatment is available, but the social problems are also there.

Anne Horsch lives in Filadelfia, Chaco, Paraguay. She is a member of the national WDP committee.

AUGUST: Fair Trade and the Global Marketplace

The phrase "fairly traded" is becoming more known and more popular. In some ways, fair trade is a movement rather than just a way to spend your money or obtain goods.

There are many factors involved with ethical shopping. Here are the main ones:

1. **Transparency and accountability in the marketplace.** Many of us would like to know about working conditions in the place where a product is made. Are the workers exploited? Are reasonable hours observed?

2. **Payment of a fair price at the place of manufacture or origin.** We know that an article goes through many hands on its way from producer to consumer. Is the payment at each level a fair one? Is it necessary to have the product move through so many levels?

3. **Gender equity.** In most manufacturing situations, women do the work. Often they have little education and come from poor families. Is it possible to enforce labour laws

or to make the conditions where products are made, safe and healthy? Do we, as consumers, have responsibility for this?

4. **Labelling.** Most of us read the label when we are considering a purchase. Does this tell us what we need to know? Our Canadian labelling laws allow something to be labelled "made in Canada" even if it is only assembled here. In the case of food products, even if only a portion is from Canada, it can still be labelled "made in Canada".

5. **Consideration of the environment.** These days there is a lot of interest in consuming locally-made food and other products. Certainly, for food, we know that much greenhouse gas can be eliminated by buying locally. A lot of fuel purchase is reduced. Is now the time when we should be encouraged to grow a backyard garden? Are there people in our community that we can buy from? Organic farming has become very popular

and this type of farming eliminates many chemicals that have an adverse effect on our soil and air.

6. **Creating opportunities for disadvantaged communities.**

Given the fact that there is such an imbalance of wealth between countries, is there a way for shoppers to seek out products for sale that will help the poorest places in the world? Does your local community have a Ten Thousand Villages store, where salespeople are volunteers? Does your local church put on a sale where products come from small women's co-ops? Perhaps this should be a consideration for us all! Small steps can lead to great things.

Sue Mackay-Smith is a WICC Council member. She lives in Penticton, B.C.



SEPTEMBER: Update on Guyana

Violence has been an ongoing issue in Guyana, with incidents of crimes regularly reported in the media. Domestic violence is on the increase particularly against women, children and older persons and is gaining national attention.

Headlines in the daily newspapers include: "Woman hacked to death" "Black Bush woman chopped after rebuking son-in-law" "Gang [men] terrorizing North West District Village – breaking into homes, molesting young girls – residents plead for army to assist" "Grandmother dies after being bound by robbers in her home – large sum of money stolen".



One of the causes is that many children are abandoned and left to live on the streets. And yet little attention is devoted, and few resources are deployed, to preventing crime.

Too much emphasis is still placed on enforcement actions, corrective institutions and the criminal justice system as a whole.

Missing from the government's agenda is a serious crime prevention plan that deals with the deficiencies in education and the absence of opportunities for employment. Policy makers must stop crime where it starts: among the young.

Please pray for Guyana, that there will be a reduction of violence, and renewed hope for young people.

Waveney Benjamin has been a member of the WDP Committee of Guyana since 1967 and is now Chairperson of WDP Guyana.

OCTOBER: Fellowship of the Least Coin projects

Each October, the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin (ICFLC) – with current members from Lebanon, England, the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, New Zealand, California, Puerto Rico, and the Bahamas – hold their annual meeting and award project grants for the coming year.

Funds for these projects come from the pennies and other “least coins” that women around the world have put aside each time they prayed for justice, peace and reconciliation. The two regions with the most need for these coins are Africa and Asia.

In Africa, projects receiving ICFLC grants are designed to improve the life of girls who have dropped out of school due to poverty, who are forced into early marriages

or child labour, who are victims of violence or orphaned due to HIV/AIDS. Many projects are focused on training these young women in job-related skills or providing them with seed money to farm and become self-reliant. In some communities, the funds provide college education for those who will some day become community leaders.

In Asia, many of the projects are educational in nature and focused on young women already on the path to fulfilling their potential. These grants support training in leadership skills to help the young women deal with issues of poverty, disability, and natural disasters and, at the same time, address gender-equality in many regions.

The emphasis of many grants is on young women. The funding of these projects will

make a difference in Africa and Asia. These projects are changing lives around the world, thanks to the support and prayers from all who participate in the FLC.

Let us pray for Moumita Biswas of the Christian Conference of Asia, who brought 11 projects to our attention, and Rose Musila of the All Africa Conference of Churches, who brought seven projects to receive funding. And let us continue to pray that the love of God will spread peace, justice and reconciliation around the world.

Pat Allinson is Executive Director of WICC and Honorary Treasurer of the ICFLC. She lives in Toronto, Ontario.



NOVEMBER: India

The people of India, especially the residents of its commercial centre Mumbai, are increasingly vulnerable to terrorism. A series of bombings and other attacks have killed nearly 800 people since 2005.

India was under foreign rule from the early 1800s until the demise of the British Raj in 1947. But the subsequent partition of the sub-continent sowed the seeds for future conflict. There have been three wars between India and Pakistan since 1947, two of them over the disputed territory of Kashmir.

A peace process, which started in 2004, has stayed on track despite tension over Kashmir and terrorist attacks, including the high-profile strikes in Mumbai which left nearly 200 people dead last November, and



the bombing of Mumbai’s train network in July 2006.

India was hit by six terror strikes in 2008 alone, yet the Indian police appear to be incapacitated by a lack of money and training. Poor working conditions, rudimentary

surveillance and communications equipment, inadequate forensic science laboratories and outdated weaponry are making matters worse. In most states, an average policeman’s salary and status is equivalent to that of an unskilled municipal worker.

Although India has been experiencing an economic boom in the past decade, most Muslims are not benefiting, partly because of deep-seated discrimination. Much of the recent violence is blamed on disaffected Muslims. As well, communal, caste and regional tensions continue to threaten India.

Pray for the people of India, that they may have courage in the face of fear, peace with their neighbours, and wise leadership.

Sources: BBC News, Reuters

DECEMBER: Violence against women

Educate – Educate – Educate! The statistics have not changed in recent years: one in every ten women is battered either physically or mentally in this country.

Although this is a serious issue, I found it interesting lately that a comic strip (“Between Friends”) addresses the truth of a woman living in an abusive situation. In the comic, Maeve’s friend Tamara lives in fear of her husband who is mostly, according to Tamara, verbally abusive. But we never know what goes on behind closed doors, and how fear can silence women in need.

We must be good listeners and then encourage our sisters to leave their abusive situations. We can inform ourselves through references such as WICC’s resource

Healing Waters: Churches Working to End Violence Against Women.

Educate – Educate – Educate! We can help by directing our sisters to places of refuge and healing. We should be aware of places in our communities where help is available. I live in a relatively small, affluent community in the western part of Montreal, and yet there are nine outreach locations for victims of abuse or violence.

The measureable health-related costs of violence against women in Canada exceed \$1.5 million. Should not our national budgets be directed to education programs that would prevent such violence?

This month, we remember the female students massacred in Montreal on December

6, 1989. Since then there have been a number of incidents of violence in educational institutions across North America.

As well as education, we need to turn to prayer. May God help us to educate and empower our youth to achieve success while maintaining an inner peace through spiritual reflection. This feeling will translate into a more peaceful world. Amen.

Eleanor Arless is a member of WICC. She lives in Pointe Claire, Quebec.

