



The newsletter
of the

Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada

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Winter 2007-08



Welcome: Judith Snowdon (foreground) is embraced by Megumi Matsuo Saunders as she takes on her new role as WICC President.

WICC welcomes new president

Judith Snowdon was nervous but determined as she rose at the end of the recent Fall Council meeting to make her first brief speech as WICC's new president. "I envision this Council as a place of diversity and hospitality," she said, emphasizing her commitment to openness and inclusivity.

Outgoing President Megumi Matsuo Saunders – who now takes on the advisory one-year role as Past President – thanked council members for their support and welcomed Judith to her new role. Also accepting new positions on the WICC board, following elections, were: Janet Anstead, who has become the new President-Elect; and Holly Patterson, the

new Chair of the Communications Committee. Lynn Smart was elected as World Day of Prayer International Liaison, as Marilyn Fortin has now taken on the role of a North-American-Caribbean representative on the International Executive Committee.

Other highlights of the council meeting, held in Toronto on Nov. 9-11, 2007, included: the Annual General Meeting; a visioning and planning process; and a workshop on the new Ambassador Kits along with a brainstorming session on ideas for promoting WICC. As well, Membership Committee Chair Elaine MacInnis reported on a new initiative to attract council members.

Council develops five-year plan

Council members remembered the past and charted a course for the future during the Fall Council meeting. Former president Claire Heron facilitated three visioning and planning sessions during the weekend event.

The meeting opened with a brainstorming session where council members reviewed WICC's accomplishments over the past 10 years in the light of the organization's mission statement and core values. WICC's ongoing programs and priorities were analyzed by looking at their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, then goals and future directions were envisioned during small

group and committee work.

A final planning session revealed several main areas that council members have agreed to focus on over the next five years. The plan includes:

- ◆ Strengthening connections and building on-going relationships with regional WICs and WICC supporters.
- ◆ Providing support and workshop resources to World Day of Prayer coordinating groups to encourage regional Festival or Preparation Days, and increased awareness about WDP.
- ◆ Improving follow-up to education days by providing leadership training and

Five-year plan continued on page 7



Visioning: Council member Inez Penney participates in a review of WICC's programs.



Rooted in faith,
called to action ♯
De la foi à l'action

Publications Mail Agreement 40021213

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Letter from the President

A dream of unity

My first introduction to the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada was when I was young, about ten or eleven years old. The churches in our little town of Tesswater, Ontario, always united for the World Day of Prayer service. My father was the pastor of the local Pentecostal Church and I was asked if I would sing and play at the service. I well remember the event; wearing my little green coat, with fingers trembling and my piano teacher looking on, singing, of all things, "When I've Gone the Last Mile of the Way". I liked the melody!

Consequently, when asked by a friend who was a Council member if I would consider joining WICC, my interest was immediately piqued. Being on the Council has been a wonderful experience. I have met amazing people from all across Canada, from many denominations and backgrounds. However, when I was invited to consider running for President, I considered all of the reasons why I could not do this: I was far too busy, I really didn't like leadership positions, I just wanted to focus my time on music, and so on. But there was a chord resonating deep within me that reminded me of my longtime prayers for a united Body of Christ; dreams for a world where Christians would put aside the little piece of theology, the unique truth that made them spiritually superior and separated them from the rest of the Christian world. I looked around that table at WICC, and realized that I had the promise of that right there before my eyes!

It is, therefore, my dream that we at Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada can embody the unity that Jesus prayed for the night before he was crucified: "I pray...for those who will believe in me. May they all be one. God, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me" (John 17:20-21).

It is my dream that, as WICC moves forward, we can become a cohesive body that can grow in ecumenism, share spirituality and prayer and become a dynamic movement that can respond to justice issues affecting women.

WICC NEWS

is published and distributed by the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada.

Established in 1918, WICC is a national council of representatives from 11 church partners. Membership is by appointment and election; for more information on becoming a Council Member, please contact the office.

The Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada is a national Christian women's council encouraging women to grow in ecumenism, to share their spirituality and prayer, to engage in dialogue about women's concerns, to respond to national and international issues affecting women, and to take action together for justice.

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Rooted in faith, called to action



Fellowship of the Least Coin ~ 2008

The following concerns have been chosen as our prayers in 2008. You may wish to encourage wider participation by printing these concerns in your church newsletter. For more information, contact the WICC office at (416) 929-5184.

January: TONGA AND ITS STRUGGLE OVER SOIL

In October 2007, delegates to the 27th annual meeting of the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin were hosted by the Pacific Council of Churches in the Kingdom of Tonga. Tonga is the only remaining monarchy in the South Pacific. For those of us who attended that meeting and enjoyed their warm hospitality, it truly felt that the Tongans are living in Paradise.

But there are problems in paradise. The Tongans are painfully aware of their poverty. A pro-democracy organization has been formed and, when marching in December 2006, radicals burned down two-thirds of the city centre in their capital, Nuku'alofa. Since they don't have any money, the Tongans are asking tourists to help the rebuilding process by praying for the current crisis in the way of life in Tonga.

One of the current crises is over land ownership. Under Tongan law, only men may own land. Attempts to amend the laws have been unsuccessful, with only a minor change in 2006 that allows a woman to register family lands if there is no male heir, and then pass it on to her son.

Meanwhile, the population of Tonga has dwindled; many of the younger generation have migrated to Australia or New Zealand and will never return. This has created a situation where there are many absentee landowners, yet their property is unable to be transferred to another person. The law of succession dictates that the land must go to a male heir, so it cannot be willed or sold to someone else. A widow can live on her late husband's land until she remarries or is proven to have committed adultery. Widows have been subjected to false claims by ruthless relatives wishing to gain land ownership.

Please pray for the women of Tonga in this historic struggle, and in particular for:

- ◆ The single women who want to own land
- ◆ The sisters who live off their brothers' land
- ◆ The women who are married to men who are not entitled to land
- ◆ The daughters who remained unmarried in order to look after their parents, and inherit neither land nor property.

Let us pray for Vala and Fuiva and Asinate, Sister Keiti, Lo, and the beautiful women of Tonga as they move forward with their plan of action to improve their land rights, and to keep peace in their beautiful kingdom.

Pat Allinson is Executive Director of WICC and lives in Toronto, Ontario.

February: GUYANA: FOCUS OF WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

Guyana is an Amerindian word meaning Land of Many Waters – an appropriate name for a country with many lakes, wetlands and rivers. In the rainforests and jungles of the interior, humankind has had little impact. Jaguars still roam the forests and the cries of howler monkeys echo eerily. Flashes of scarlet, yellow and blue burst through the forest's intense green as macaws fly like arrows across a clearing. Toucans and awesome Harpy Eagles are but two of the 700 species of indigenous birds.

This is a country of exceptional natural beauty and a splendid combination of the Caribbean and South America, with a sometimes turbulent past. Perched on the northeast corner of the South American continent, Guyana stretches 450 miles from its long Atlantic coastline into dense equatorial forest and the broad savannah of the Rupununi. The country possesses enormous underutilized forestry, mineral, and fishery resources. It is uniquely well-positioned to serve as a gateway for trade between North America and Brazil.

Currently, Guyana faces a multitude of development challenges: a weak economy, rising crime, poor security, continued out-migration, the specter of HIV/AIDS, and high infant mortality. Maternal mortality is 190 per 100,000 live births and infant mortality is 54 per 1,000, both relatively high for the Latin America and Caribbean region; and the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Guyana is second only to Haiti in the region.

Violence against women is also a serious problem in Guyana. Domestic violence has been linked with human trafficking; these issues are being addressed through legislation and education. The country has also recently recognized the link between violence against women and the high rate of HIV infection.

Although no official emigration figures exist, the country has been gradually losing its educated professionals. This loss of human capital undermines the government of Guyana's capacity to provide quality health, education, and social services.

On March 8, 2008, we will celebrate World Day of Prayer services written by the women of Guyana. We pray that "God's Wisdom Provides New Understanding" as this beautiful country tries to address its critical issues.

Marilyn Fortin is Chair of WICC's Ecumenical Gatherings Committee. She lives in Morden, Manitoba.

March: CHALLENGING A POWER IMBALANCE

In March we celebrate International Women's Day. This is a good time to look at the conditions that women live in, both nationally and internationally. It is a good time to think about violence against women and its source, power inequality. Many women do not have the power to change their life situations and therefore are victims of circumstances around them. The list of disadvantaged women is long!

Many Aboriginal women in B.C. have disappeared or been murdered, especially on the "Highway of Tears" between Prince George and Prince Rupert in B.C., yet little has been done to solve these crimes.

Indo-Canadian women, particularly in B.C., have been victims of spousal or family-connected murders. These are hard to understand and raise questions about the value of women's lives.

In Darfur, Sudan, there are horrendous stories of women being raped by the rebel military group, the Janjaweed. When women leave their compounds to look for firewood, they become vulnerable to attack.

Many women, especially from Eastern Europe, are lured into the net of traffickers. They become objects that are bought and sold, and often end up far away from their home country with no power to return.

In all of these situations, the power imbalance between women and men is shocking. How do we make a difference? Perhaps we need to start with the way we treat our children. We need to be fair in giving opportunities to girls and boys equally. By supporting UN and other organizations, we can help to challenge the unfairness that exists around the world.

Our churches, too, must set an example by moving away from a patriarchal model. We all have a responsibility for this. There is much talk these days about the world being a global village and we all want this "village" to have shared leadership and power between women and men.

Loving God, you value each of us. Help us to be fair in our dealings with each other. We pray that people in power positions will recognize and use the abilities that each person has. In troubled lands, we pray for courage for justice workers. We pray that each of us will find a way to make a difference in the world far away as well as the world close by. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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

April: SUPPORT FOR GRIEVING PARENTS

May 3, 2008 will be the one-year anniversary of the death of my friend Shirley's daughter, Suzanne. As the saying goes, Suzanne had everything to live for. In 1992, Suzanne obtained a Ph.D. in Physiology and, after five years at the U.S. National Institute of Health, returned to Canada to set up her own research lab at the University of Western Ontario. She was a founding member of the CIHR Group in the Skeletal Development and Remodelling Department.

Suzanne married in 2002. Two years later she was diagnosed with breast cancer. For four years, while continuing her research and teaching, Suzanne battled the cancer that eventually would spread through her body. Throughout this time her parents journeyed from Montreal to London to help as best they could. They prayed for a miracle, but it was not to happen. During the last three months of Suzanne's life, her mother Shirley moved in with her daughter to provide comfort.

Over the course of three years I could see Shirley's body language change and her *joie de vivre* wane, in spite of her efforts to keep busy and affable. Shirley and her husband Phil barely had the time to grieve their daughter's death when Phil was diagnosed with Stage 4 liver cancer. It is uncertain that Phil will live to experience the first anniversary of Suzanne's death. Shirley is grieving the death of her daughter while watching her husband in all his grief and sadness succumb to cancer.

For support in times of grief, some people turn to books, support groups and websites. I have spoken to mothers who have lost a child and read books and explored websites in the hope of learning how to be truly empathetic and helpful to grieving friends. One website, "The Compassionate Friends" (www.compassionatefriends.org) is an international, non-denominational self-help organization offering friendship, understanding and hope for the future of all families who have experienced the death of a child.

All writers agree that the death of a child is a life-altering experience. Parents never return to their former selves. There are physical losses and spiritual losses. Time provides some healing but their family lives have been turned upside down.

Grieving parents need our prayers. And so we turn to prayer for our grieving sisters and brothers: Dear God, wrap your arms around all those who grieve, in particular parents grieving the loss of a child. Give them some solace in their ever-changing world. This we ask of you in mercy. Amen.

Eleanor Arless is a WICC Council member and a grandmother who lives in Pointe Claire, Quebec.

May: FAMILIES SUFFER HARDSHIP IN NEWFOUNDLAND

In July 1992, the federal government imposed a cod moratorium on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Life for the fisherfolk there suddenly changed drastically. Ever since settling these shores in the 15th century, our forefathers had been letting down their nets into the sea... and catching cod.

Much of this fish was bartered to fish merchants for food, clothing and the essentials to maintain life. The fish were salted, dried and shipped to countries, overseas. Cash for this commodity then came into the hands of the merchants, who replenished the supplies for fishermen, and the cycle continued.

However, since Confederation, the federal government – whose job it is to protect the offshore fishery – has traded our fish for other commodities throughout the world. Modern technology has also come into play and too much pressure has been put on our cod stocks.

In later years, fish plants were established in many communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, where plant workers were employed to process the fresh cod and make it ready for local or overseas markets. These fish plants provided a steady source of employment to help these little towns survive.

However, many of our local plants have had to close. Even if, during a short grace period, fishermen are allowed to obtain a catch, much of our fish is shipped to other countries. The fish is processed overseas more cheaply, and then shipped back to us to buy at a higher price.

This is a gross indignity for our people! So many of our older people, thrown out of work late in life with no opportunity for retraining or chance of work, are uprooting their families and fleeing to places in Canada where employment abounds, mainly the oil fields in Alberta. Our younger people, who at one time may have gone into the fishery, are leaving as well.

What a toll this has taken on family life in Newfoundland and Labrador! Many say goodbye to neighbours they have lived beside all their lives, in their own homes, to live crowded together in whatever housing they can find affordable in these new places. Grandparents lose contact with children and grandchildren. The impact on children, after being nurtured in a close family and community environment, to be faced with settling into new schools and finding new friends, is devastating.

Let us pray that our families, far away, may ever be held in God's love and protection and that those who wait at home may be comforted by this same love.

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

June: WALKING WITH ABORIGINAL WOMEN

A number of women hold a special yet painful place in my heart and memory. Some of these women I grew up with on the Reserve, while others grew up in the city. Some of these women were my childhood friends, neighbours, and cousins. Many of them I didn't know at all. I'd come to know them only through the inside pages of the local newspaper, and other times in daily obituaries. These women have much in common: all died at a very early age, in the prime of their lives, all were First Nations, and all of their deaths were a result of a violent act of another.

I have wondered a lot about who was to blame for these deaths, but I've not been satisfied by any answers. No doubt this is because of my growing awareness of the extent of violence that has been, and continues to be, perpetuated against First Nations' women, as well as a growing recognition of the complexities that underly this issue. One of the issues is a lack of choice.

For many native women, choices are extremely limited. Daily life can consist of a routine of survival that could exhaust and discourage even the most robust. The vulnerable are apt to assume a sense of blame and shame. It has been through sitting for hours with a pastoral ear that I say unapologetically the reality is, there is despair in our world today. We do no good to deny it.

Today, in our midst, there are many that are heavily burdened with the sense of powerlessness. As Christians, we must sit with the uncertainty and heaviness of despair, and trust that from this place we find the hope and compassion that moves us to walk with our Aboriginal sisters and their families.

It is my hope that the church has a growing recognition of its capacity to provide a mission of solidarity. In our intention to seek a solidarity that recognizes relationships as just and equal, we'd do well to remember our common history. It's been said that just as we have been the recipients of the blessings left by the generations before us, so we must too, accept their burdens. It is through this lens that we can sit in good company with one another. It is through a relationship of mutual understanding and non-judgement that we further our dialogue that leads to meaningful ways of walking together.

Creator God, help us to understand our call as followers of Christ, who is leading us not to an attitude of subjugation of the other, but to one of liberation. May we walk the paths of despair and hope together. Amen.

Rev. Maggie McLeod is president of Hamilton Conference (UCC) and ministers with the Saugeen First Nation, Ontario. This concern is adapted from an article Maggie wrote for Making Waves (Vol 6.1).

July: ISSUES FACING REFUGEE WOMEN

Imagine your life like this: a violent conflict is raging in your home country. You have seen members of your family tortured and/or killed before your eyes for no apparent reason except that they are on the wrong side of the conflict. You have seen women and young girls raped by enemy soldiers.

So, you leave everything that is familiar: your home, your friends, your family. You flee to a neighbouring country where you hope to find safety. When you get there, you are herded with thousands of other people into a refugee camp. Conditions are terrible. Food and water are scarce. Health care is practically non-existent.

You fear leaving the safety of the camp to search for firewood because of the very real possibility of physical or sexual violence. Some men offer their wives, daughters and sisters to humanitarian aid workers in return for food. Single mothers offer themselves to the workers to get food for their children. Security protecting your camp is lax, and frequent raids by the enemy leave you in constant fear for your life. You pray daily for the conflict to be over so that you can return home, or for a chance to flee to a country like Canada to start your life over in safety.

This is daily life for many refugee women in places like Darfur, northern Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Thai-Burma border, just to name a few. Recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have caused refugee women and children to seek safety in places like Pakistan.

And if you happen to be one of the fortunate ones and receive sponsorship to Canada - then what? You now face the confusion and uncertainty associated with settling in a new culture. You carry with you the physical and emotional scars of your ordeal. You may be a highly educated and successful woman in your home country, but here in Canada you are like a new baby - you need help with everything. You probably don't speak English or French. The food, customs and laws are all foreign to you. This makes you vulnerable to exploitation and potential violence.

Pray for the vulnerable women worldwide in protracted refugee situations. Pray for peace, so that these women can return home to rebuild their lives. Pray for refugee women in Canada, that they may find the help they need to re-establish their lives in peace and safety.

Holly Patterson is Director of The Salvation Army Immigrant & Refugee Services in Toronto and serves as chair of WICC's Communications Committee.

August: CANADIAN PEACEKEEPERS IN AFGHANISTAN

Since 2002, Canadian troops have been in Afghanistan aiding humanitarian efforts and promoting peace and stability. About 2,500 Canadians are currently serving in Afghanistan.

Under the Taliban regime, which lasted from 1996 to 2001, Afghan women were ostracized from society, denied formal education, excluded from political life, not allowed to hold jobs or even permitted to leave their homes unescorted.

The situation has improved in some areas: 35% of the children attending schools are girls, and women participated in the last National Assembly elections with 25% of the parliamentarians being women. However, these gains are extremely fragile, and many Taliban-type laws are being imposed in areas outside the capital of Kabul. Conservative and patriarchal attitudes still prevail and violence against women has been increasing. In rural areas, where 85% of the Afghan population lives, new government restrictions and roving militia groups have made women's lives worse.

This mission is affecting Canadians both here at home and those deployed abroad. We live near a military base and my daughter has many friends with spouses who have been or are going to Afghanistan on a peacekeeping tour of duty. She often calls to ask me to include a friend in my prayers. The problems they are facing range from the fear that their spouse may not return, the reported death of a soldier in the media, loneliness, struggles with what to tell children of their parent's job, and sometimes just the difficulty of day-to-day living or coping with media reports.

Pray for the soldiers and their families, especially for those who are grieving or have suffered from loss and injury.

In Afghanistan, as many as 1,000 Afghan women risked their lives to gather in six different cities to pray for peace in December 2007.

Pray for the people of Afghanistan who have suffered through 30 years of violence, conflict and war. Pray for the healing and reconciliation of people and communities torn apart, lament the lives lost, and pledge to work for peace.

The Canadian Council of Churches, in its August 2007 letter to the Prime Minister, said: "Canada has an obligation not to abandon the people of Afghanistan... As Scripture instructs us, we are to care for and respect our neighbours, especially the poor, the voiceless and the defenceless."

Pray that the peacekeeping forces in Afghanistan will protect the vulnerable, and help to restore peace, justice and security to all people.

Irene Churchill is Secretary-Treasurer of WICC. She lives in Eganville, Ontario.

September: BUILDING BRIDGES AT FESTIVAL DAY

Festival Day began 10 years ago in Toronto to prepare lay women to host the World Day of Prayer the following March. Festival Day is a day when we reflect on the theme of the WDP, attempting to discern its meaning in the culture of the country with whose people we are praying and tying its meaning into our own country.

In the WDP for South Africa the theme "Signs of the Times" invited us to find God at work in South Africa, in the women who had endured torture at the time of apartheid but with God's grace had risen to become leaders.

We found the "Signs of the Times" in our own Canada in the three women ecologists who helped to protect over 4,000 hectares of wilderness in Quebec, of the man who spent 8 years of his life campaigning for a frog tunnel under a Canadian highway to allow 200 frogs per day in the spring to cross unharmed to the marsh, thus saving a natural species.

Festival Day is a day when we learn about the country whose women wrote their concerns into the prayer service. We try to make it a day when all the Key Persons hosting the WDP can meet women who were born in the WDP country. These women usually bring their food, cultural costumes and entertainment to show us the colourful and rich history of their roots.

A speaker who was born in the WDP country, has visited recently and understands the history and politics of her country of origin is a special treat of Festival Day. When it is not possible to find such a speaker, then we listen to missionaries or medical workers who have lived in the WDP country and can tell us of the people there. All these speakers relate their stories to the theme of the WDP.

Festival Day not only introduces the WDP resources to local coordinators, but most of all it supplies us with memories: the ample generosity of the Venezuelans, the hymns of the Romanian men's choir, the two Lebanese speakers remembering peace in Lebanon, the Polish speaker who had studied women's rights in Poland, the Paraguayan woman worried about trafficking, and the Guyanese community who responsibly and intelligently presented us with ideas for combating racism.

Each year we pray that God leads us in grace and strength to find inspiring people and new ideas to pass on to the WDP hosts. Let us pray that we continue through this Festival Day to grow closer to our global neighbours, to expand our WDP services across Canada and to find new ideas for working for peace and action in our WDP services.

Lynn Smart is a WICC council member and Chair of Toronto's Festival Day.

October: WICC CELEBRATES ITS 90TH ANNIVERSARY

On Oct. 19, 1918, Bessie MacMurchy wrote a letter which was destined to affect ecumenical work by Canadian women. She wrote on behalf of the Executive Board of the Women's Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church in Canada (Western Division) to invite four other denominational women's groups to participate in an Annual Interdenominational Prayer Meeting for Women which would be:

"evidence of the unity of our Faith and Hope and of our Love for the Lord Jesus Christ, and would be an opportunity to unite in Prayer".

Bessie's idea obviously struck a chord and on February 15th of the next year a planning meeting was held involving women of the Anglican, Methodist, Congregational, Baptist and Presbyterian Churches of Canada. Their planning gave rise to a mass meeting on May 16, 1919, *"supporting the distribution of Christian literature"*. This was followed by the first National Day of Prayer, held in Lindsay, Ontario, on Jan. 9, 1920.

From those key events, we trace the birth of the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada. It is the hope and prayer of the Council and staff that Bessie and her friends would gaze upon the WICC of today with fondness, and be proud of the meaningful ministry they created.

This month we celebrate the 90th anniversary of that initial letter as we herald a year of celebration of the ministry of WICC. This ministry honours the spirit of those early women through the unifying prayer movements of the Fellowship of the Least Coin and the World Day of Prayer. This ministry reaches out, through our commitment to justice and peace work, to give voice to those who are often silenced. This ministry is committed to creating an ever-widening circle where all will feel welcomed and valued.

This month, we ask you to offer up your prayers for WICC. Offer up prayers that we may continue to give meaning to the intentions of those founding mothers. Offer up prayers that we may continue to work towards unifying women of faith from all racial, social and economic backgrounds. Offer up prayers that we may continue as a prophetic voice speaking out about the brokenness of our world. And finally, offer up prayers to yourselves, for without women like you, WICC would never have lasted to celebrate 90 years!

Rev. Janet Anstead is WICC's President-Elect and a minister at a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) near London, Ontario.

November: LIVING UNDER EMPIRE

Throughout the Scriptures, people struggled with the question, "How does one live in the midst of Empire?" The Empire represents the antithesis of life lived within the Realm of God. Over time, the Empire would take various titles. In the time of Moses and the Exodus, it was Egypt. During the Exile, think Babylon. In the days of the Gospels, it was Rome that ruled the roost. The names may vary, but the characteristics were surprisingly similar: Greed, Waste, Domination, Disregard for others, Violence, Inequity, Destruction.

It is difficult for us to understand the teachings of Jesus without understanding what he means when he talks about the "Realm of God". This phrase, central to his teachings, challenged the kingdoms of his day. It was Jesus' resistance to the forces of the Roman Empire and the "Religious Empire" of those controlling the Jerusalem temple that played a key part in his being sentenced to death upon the cross.

Jesus intentionally used the term "Realm of God" to get people's attention and to make statements against the realities of life under Roman rule. He turned the values of Empire on its head when he spoke of life lived under the rule of God.

Today we still live in the midst of Empire and its oppression. These values teach that "might makes right," and wealth and power are to be prized above all else. Not only are these values harmful to the earth and to the least powerful of the earth, they also are harmful to those who hold them.

We live in a scandalous world, where signs of domination by Empire are endless:

- ◆ The richest 1% of people on this globe possess an amount equal to that of the poorest 57%.
- ◆ 24,000 people die each day from poverty and malnutrition.
- ◆ One month's worth of global military spending could help the world meet all its sanitation, food and educational needs for one year.
- ◆ Agriculture is in crisis. Farmers in India are facing deep despair – 150,000 have committed suicide in the last decade of trade liberalization.
- ◆ Haiti, which was once covered with forest, now has vegetation on only 2% of its soil.
- ◆ An estimated 250,000 children are serving in armed conflict in 20 countries.

Pray the Lord's prayer with a renewed sense of living under Empire: *"Your realm of God of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth..."*

Megumi Matsuo Saunders is Past President of WICC. She works with children and youth at First Metropolitan United Church in Victoria.

Sources: *Worshipping Faithfully in the Midst of Empire and Children Tell the Story* (United Church).

December: REMEMBERING TRAGIC ANNIVERSARIES

The month of December for most Christians brings to mind the celebration of the birth of Jesus. For many people, however, the month of December brings horrific memories of tragic anniversaries of violence against women and children.

Fourteen women were killed at Montreal's - École Polytechnique on Dec. 6, 1989, by an enraged woman-hater. These young women went to school that day, full of aspirations for wonderful careers, oblivious to the fact that it would be the last day of their lives.

An anniversary we remember here at the MCC office in Winnipeg is the disappearance of the child of our staff member Wilma Derksen. Her daughter, Candace, disappeared 23 years ago, on Nov. 30, 1984, and her body was found on Jan. 17, 1985. Our office grieves with Wilma and Cliff as they remember their daughter and the violence which took her from them.

Violence against women isn't new. Statistics Canada documents prove that the number of women murdered has gone up by 30% in the last five years, from 149 in 2000, to 196 in 2004.

The purpose for remembering the events of Dec. 6, 1989, and Nov. 30, 1984, is to move ahead with organized prevention programs, as well as to focus on the importance of **listening to the voices of women**. If every peace-minded person opposed acts of hatred and violence on humanity, and urged governments to include women in peace-making processes, visible changes would be evident in our society.

The Manitoba Government just passed a law, the first of its kind in Canada, which allows women to press charges against a stalker. Until now, a person who was being stalked by someone other than a sexual partner could not press charges. This new law is a step in the right direction. It does not prevent violence, but it is a small move towards empowerment of women.

Let us make Dec. 6 a day to reflect, remember and plan for proactive ways to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against people, especially women and children.

Luke 4:18-19 speaks about people being given the spirit of God in order to be a "voice" to free those who have been oppressed and treated unfairly, and to give hope for a time when God will show kindness to all people. The spirit of God is alive and active in us, and it is up to us to show others this active Spirit through proactive acts of mercy and compassion. Let's use our voices and work towards eliminating violence in our midst.

Jane Woelk is Coordinator of MCC's "Voices for Non-Violence" program, and a WICC council member.

Five-year plan continued from page 1

skills development for council members.

- ◆ Involving and encouraging the participation of younger women.
- ◆ Creating a questionnaire and follow-up process to better meet the needs of WICC constituents and supporters.
- ◆ Improving coordination and integration of work coming out of WICC's two program committees: the Justice and Peace Committee, which focuses on social justice issues; and the Ecumenical Gatherings Committee, which focuses on programs such as the World Day of Prayer and Fellowship of the Least Coin.

The Council agreed to begin by contacting regional groups and sending out a questionnaire in the new year. A follow-up report will be presented at Spring Council, which will be held in Toronto May 30 - June 1, 2008.

WICC to celebrate 90th Anniversary

In October, 2008, WICC will celebrate a famous letter (dated Oct. 19, 1918) from Bessie MacMurchy inviting members of other denominational Women's Missionary Societies to come together to organize a national Prayer Meeting. This letter led to a planning meeting on Feb. 15, 1919, and then a mass meeting on May 19. These meetings led to the first National Day of Prayer, held in Lindsay, Ontario, on Feb. 20, 1920.

We trace the birth of the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada to that invitation from Bessie MacMurchy. And WICC is inviting you to be part of our birthday celebrations, which will run from October 2008 to May 2009.

WICC has already started planning for its anniversary, which will have as its theme "Widening the Circle". With the

help of former Council member and history buff Jocelyn Rait, we've been learning more about our history from the archives. A small committee, including Jocelyn and former President June Dyer, has been planning a commemorative DVD. A design for a lapel pin has been approved, and a poster, liturgy and Bible studies are in the works.

These materials, along with a special grant of \$250 in seed money, are available for any group that would like to organize its own WICC celebration by reaching out and "widening" their own circle. Ideas include: organizing a service of celebration; organizing a birthday tea party; or planning any gathering that fits with the theme "Widening the Circle".

To apply for seed money, or for information, please contact the WICC office.

Fall Council Photo Album



Working together: Council members, clockwise from top left: Marilyn Fortin, Sue Mackay-Smith, Jillian Harris, Eleanor Arless, Megumi Matsuo Saunders, Amy Hill and Elaine MacInnis.



Photos by Cillian Barfoot

Council news

One new member attended her first council meeting in November:

Amy Hill is the new appointee from United Church of Canada. She lives in Mississauga, Ontario.



Council member **Patsy Grant** has received the Mary/Martha Award, given by the Women's Ministry of the Diocese of Rupert's Land to honour Anglican women for their outstanding work at parish,



diocesan, and national levels. Patsy is the President of the Winnipeg WIC, a member of the steering group of the International Anglican Women's Network, and a member of the Manitoba Ethnocultural Advisory and Advocacy Council.



WICC's Justice and Peace Committee Chair **Hazel Campayne** was honoured with a Lifetime Achievement Award during



the Guyana Awards Gala held this past May. Hazel, a founding member of the Canada-Guyana Forum, was recognized for her ongoing advocacy for social justice, human rights, peace and democracy in Guyana. She is a member of the Ontario Black History Society and is also a member of the Ontario Bicentenary Commemorative Committee on the Abolition of the Slave Trade.

World Day of Prayer 2008: Guyana

The women of Guyana invite us to rejoice with them at the astonishing natural beauty of Guyana: "Come with us as we acknowledge the Wisdom of God in the marvelous works of creation".

Guyana is the focus of this year's World Day of Prayer, celebrated by over 2,000 Christian congregations in Canada and more than 170 countries around the world. We encourage you to start planning now to join women and men of faith around the world as we celebrate the World Day of Prayer on Friday, March 7, 2008.

In this year's World Day of Prayer service, on the theme "God's Wisdom Brings New Understanding", the women of Guyana ask Christians around the world to pray for a number of issues, including poverty, HIV and AIDS, and violence against women.

A new resource offered this year is a

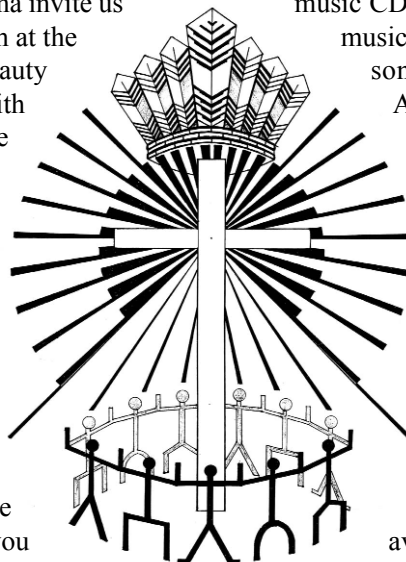
music CD, which includes service music as well as other choral songs from Guyana.

Another popular resource is the DVD and videotape, which feature a narrated slideshow focusing on the people and country of Guyana.

Service booklets and resource materials are being mailed out from the WICC office now. A number of resources are also available online this year; check out our WDP2008 page at www.wicc.org.

The World Day of Prayer began in Canada and the United States in 1922 and gradually spread around the world. Over the past six years, about 151,000 World Day of Prayer services have been conducted in 90 languages with 16 million participants worldwide.

To order materials or to learn more about World Day of Prayer, please visit our website at www.wicc.org, phone (416) 929-5184, or e-mail wicc@wicc.org.



Check out our WICC Resources

✓ **Healing Waters: Churches Working to End Violence Against Women** (164 pgs) \$20

This practical handbook written by Carol Penner includes: advice on responding to a woman who has been abused; handouts on abuse, myths and shelters; workshop, Bible study, and worship resources; an historical overview of violence against women; theological and biblical background; and church and community action ideas. *(English only)*



✓ **Some Women Amazed Us** (114 pgs) \$27

This book, written by former council member Bernice Santor, features 12 Bible study sessions with named and unnamed Biblical women, and also includes colour prints of five quilts of Biblical women and accompanying monologues. *(English only)*



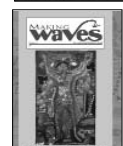
✓ **Starting with Women's Lives, Changing Today's Economy** (103 pgs) \$18

This is a newly revised and expanded edition of the popular illustrated hands-on manual by Bev Burke & Suzanne Doerge for facilitating "The Wall": a tool that helps women do a gender analysis of today's economy. *(English, French and Spanish)*



✓ **December 6 Liturgy Free**

WICC prepares an annual liturgy of remembrance and hope for December 6, Canada's Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. Available October 1. *(English & French)*



✓ **Making Waves** For members of WICC's Network: \$35 donation per year. This ecumenical magazine focuses on justice issues that affect women in church and society.

Prices include shipping. To order, contact the WICC office: Ph: 416-929-5184 E-mail: wicc@wicc.org