



The newsletter
of the

Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada

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Winter 2004-05

Fall Council report

Change & celebration

The Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada addressed its life and work at its recent Fall Council and Annual General Meeting. A workshop designed to integrate the Council's new racial justice policy into its administrative and program work was at the top of the agenda. Pat Allinson, who has been Acting Executive Director since December 2003, was named Executive Director of WICC, and elections were held for positions on the Board of Directors. The weekend gathering, held in Toronto Nov. 19 – 21, provided an opportunity for program and administrative meetings, worship, discussion of annual reports, and celebrations for new and retiring members. Highlights are summarized below.

◆ **Racial justice workshop:** Gwyn Griffith, member of WICC's Anti-Racism Task Group, was invited to facilitate a two-hour workshop to help Council members integrate WICC's new racial justice policy into its work and place this work within a global context. Through discussion and small-group work, Council members identified what steps need to be taken to implement the new policy.

◆ **Elections:** Due to the death of President Elect Janet Campbell this past August, Claire Heron has agreed to stay on as President of WICC for an additional year. Megumi Matsuo Saunders was elected to the position of President Elect for a one-year term, Judith Snowdon was elected Chair of the Membership and Nominating Committee, and Hazel Campayne was elected Chair of the Justice and Peace Committee.

◆ **Finance:** WICC ended the fiscal year with a surplus of \$233 and has approved a balanced budget for 2004-05.



WICC Executive Director Pat Allinson

◆ **Office and staff:** The Council received an update on WICC's beautiful new office space in the Toronto School of Theology building on the University of Toronto campus. In addition to the appointment of Pat Allinson as Executive Director of WICC, permanent positions were granted to Norah McMurtry, Program Coordinator, and Gillian Barfoot, Communications Coordinator.

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Janet Campbell: artist and activist

When Janet Campbell lost her brief battle with cancer in a Calgary hospital, WICC lost a friend, a seeker after justice, and an inspiring president-elect.

Council members sent prayers and heartfelt notes and a few members of council and staff journeyed to Calgary to visit Janet in hospital. WICC staff got together to knit a "hug-a-shrug" in beautiful prairie sky colours (to give credit where credit is due: receptionist Carole Thomas did the lion's share). Janet responded with love, writing beautiful notes and making phone calls, making the most of her time.

Following her death, her husband Jim Hillson donated one of her paintings, shown above, which now occupies a place of honour in the WICC office. Thank you, Janet. We will miss you.

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Letter from the President

A time of sadness and celebration

There have been several changes at WICC since we last met through this newsletter. It was with great sadness that we dealt with the loss of a board member, Janet Campbell. In May, the Council was aware that Janet, our president-elect, was ill. Soon it became apparent that she was terminally ill. Janet lost her battle with cancer in August.

Megumi Matsuo Saunders, Pat Allinson and I attended Janet's funeral in Calgary. The church, grounds and adjoining hall were filled with memories of Janet's artistry which included paintings, wall hangings, prayer vests, prose and poetry. Janet was an amazingly talented woman. Her artistic gifts connected her to a host of creative people. Their presence and tributes to Janet at the funeral were powerful and a true testament to the gift Janet was to all of us. Jim Hillson, Janet's loving partner, has asked that memorial contributions be made to WICC (the office is still accepting memorial donations). Jim also donated one of Janet's paintings to WICC. We accept this generosity with gratitude. We are grateful to have Janet's presence through her art as a constant reminder of her gentle spirit.

And so we are called to move on. Things are happening at the WICC office! We are so fortunate to have such good and dedicated staff. They never missed a beat when we adjusted to fewer people on the Board and especially when the office moved in September. The Council has asked me to accept a third year as president. This is unusual but our circumstances have been unusual. I am more than willing to be a part of this transition. I don't know if you realize what a privilege it is to be working with women of faith representing eleven different denominations. An ecumenical experience such as this is pure gift!

I want to take this opportunity to thank those of you who have contributed to WICC through our recent mailing. If you missed us by chance but especially if you want to continue to support the good works of WICC, watch for the mail! WICC speaks and works for women in the churches in Canada. We appreciate your ongoing assistance.

Claire Heron is President of WICC. She lives in Saskatchewan.

Materials ready for World Day of Prayer

Service booklets and resource materials for the World Day of Prayer, which will take place on March 4, 2005, are being mailed out from the WICC office now. This year's service is written by the women of Poland on the theme "Let Our Light Shine".

Coordinators, please remember to send in your order form soon, if you haven't already. Those who live in eastern or western Canada are advised to allow four weeks for delivery. For more information, contact the WICC office.

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.

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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Fellowship of the Least Coin ~ 2005

The following concerns have been chosen as our prayers in 2005. 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 ~

ICFLC IN ACTION

From Feketic, Serbia, to New York City – there could hardly be a greater contrast. This year the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin (ICFLC) gathered at the Passionist Retreat Center in the Bronx for its annual meeting. Many of the women from tropical regions had never seen the fall colours and were thrilled with the panorama displayed on the banks of the Hudson River. It was a wonderful experience to meet with this dedicated group of women again, and an additional blessing that Claire Heron, President of Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada (WICC), was present as well.

The new chair of the ICFLC, Battu Jambawai, brought handicrafts from Kenya for us to buy in support of a project which the ICFLC had funded a few years ago. This project has enabled women to learn skills, sell their work and feed their families – tangible proof that the pennies you donate are powerful in the work they do. Thanks to the faithfulness of FLC supporters, 30 projects were funded this year, so never think that you can't make a difference. Penny by penny, people's lives can be changed for the better.

We discussed the 50th anniversary celebration of the founding of the FLC to be held in Malaysia in 2006. This year everyone is urged to look back at their FLC roots on a national basis. How did FLC start in your region of Canada? Who were the people involved? Were you involved with the 25th anniversary, or the 40th which was held in Vancouver? If you have any good FLC stories please send them in to WICC so they can be shared with the larger community.

Please continue to pray for the members of the ICFLC as they work hard for the women they represent. They may experience much injustice and oppression in their daily lives but they remain hopeful that each small effort made on behalf of peace, justice and reconciliation is a sign that things can change, their lives can improve and the love that Jesus Christ came to bring us all can prevail. Hold them in your hearts as they hold you in theirs.

Jocelyn Rait has completed her 4-year term on the ICFLC and two 4-year terms on WICC.

She is retiring shortly to have more time for her elderly mother and young grandchildren.

February ~ POLAND:

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER 2005

Poland, with a population of 38 million, is located in central-eastern Europe. Although Poland accepted Christianity 1,000 years ago, its people have struggled for independence and freedom throughout the years.

The Roman Catholic church played a large part to help preserve Polish traditions during the years of Poland's partitioning (1772-1918), and during the Communist regime (1945-1989). The other churches of Poland are Orthodox, Polish Catholic, Greek Catholic, Lutheran, Reform, Methodist, and Baptist. Poland gained independence in 1989, and began the difficult transition from a centrally run to a free market economy.

While I was attending the WDPIC Meetings in England in August 2003, I met two women of Poland. The first, a recently retired Roman Catholic school teacher, spoke of the many challenges of Polish educators, and the many struggles of Polish women, who constitute 60% of the country's unemployed. The other Polish delegate was the wife of a Baptist minister, who spends much of her time volunteering to bring together women's groups of different denominations, and to work together ecumenically. They now unite to plan and participate in WDP services every March.

The WDP Service for 2005 was written by the women of Poland. The theme, "Let Our Light Shine", was taken from Matthew: "You are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world". In this church service, the women of Poland point out, "one is not like a light, but rather, one is a light".

The people of Poland have risen above many struggles in their history, as they now share solidarity with one another to heed the gospel's call for justice, as they seek the light of God's wisdom to enable everyone to have a decent life.

The symbol of Poland is a white eagle. Let us join together to pray for the Polish people that they will be granted the strength to "soar like eagles" to bring the Light of Christ to everybody. We must all remember that our God is Light, Joy, and Life! We should not fear the darkness, but carry within Our Light for the journey!

Roma Paul is Chair of the World Day of Prayer Committee of WICC. She lives in St. John's, Newfoundland.

March ~

OUR STOLEN SISTERS

Helen Betty Osborne, Felicia Solomon, Roxanna Thiara, Alishia Germaine, Ramona Wilson, Nicola Hoar, Eva Taysup, Shelley Napope, Calina Waterhen... These are some of the women – the stolen sisters – named in a new report by Amnesty International, *Stolen Sisters: A human rights response to discrimination and violence against Indigenous women in Canada*.

In Canada, government statistics reveal that Indigenous women between the ages of 25 and 44 are five times more likely than all other women of the same age to die as the result of violence.

Amnesty International's report, based on stories from cities in western Canada where there is a large and growing Indigenous population, underscores the fact that the lives of Indigenous women in Canada are at risk precisely *because* they are Indigenous women. The research, along with the testimony of frontline organizations and the conclusions of previous government commissions and inquiries, points to the following factors linking racism and discrimination to violence against Indigenous women in urban centers in Canada:

- ▼ Police in Canada have often failed to provide Indigenous women with adequate protection.
- ▼ The social and economic marginalization of Indigenous women, along with government policies that have torn apart Indigenous families and communities, have pushed many Indigenous women into risky situations that include extreme poverty, homelessness and prostitution.
- ▼ The resulting vulnerability of Indigenous women has been exploited by Indigenous and non-Indigenous men to carry out acts of extreme brutality against Indigenous women.
- ▼ These acts of violence may be motivated by racism, or may be carried out in the expectation that societal indifference to the welfare and safety of Indigenous women will allow the perpetrators to escape justice.
- ▼ All levels of government in Canada should work closely and urgently with Indigenous peoples' organizations, and Indigenous women in particular, to institute plans of action to stop violence against Indigenous women.

Pray for an end to racism and injustice, seek justice for Indigenous and other minority groups, and voice your concerns on federal government inaction to: The Honourable Anne McLellan, Deputy Prime Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

Norah McMurtry is WICC's Program Coordinator.

April ~

CONFLICT IN COLUMBIA

Columbia is a beautiful country, rich in resources and fertile lands. It has endured 50 years of conflict. This conflict is between governments and their military forces and the various guerilla groups. The governments are protecting the interests of the elites in the country and the many multinational companies intent on exploiting Columbia's wealth.

The guerilla groups, corrupted by their quest for power, are fighting against the governments in an attempt to alleviate this exploitation of Columbia and its people. This war is often carried out in poor urban slums where 30,000 people die every year of political and generalized violence. An estimated 2.8 million people have been forced to flee their homes in the last 15 years. Caught in the cross-fire of this explosive situation are those with the least power, the poor of Columbia, especially the women and children.

Women raise children only to see them taken by the guerilla groups to fight in the endless war: *They came and took my oldest son, as well as several other youth. He was 17 at the time. And then, just a month later, they came again. This time my 12-year-old son disappeared. I waited and waited; days, weeks and months passed. Yet I heard nothing. Can you imagine a mother's grief?*

Women are brutalized, their husbands killed in front of their eyes. Children are terrorized: *Then the night came when the guerrillas stormed our village, seething with rage of a recent defeat. The soldiers crashed down the door, ransacking our home and waving their guns in our faces...They forced themselves onto me...The pain crashed back into my body as I woke to a gunshot by my head, mixed with a cry from my husband and the heightened wails of my babies. They had pillaged the town. My husband was not the only one stolen of sacred life, I was not the only woman to conceive.*

In spite of the adversity and affliction, many women continue to live their lives with passion and spirit. Even when the greatest challenge is to simply stay alive, many women fight for a life with dignity for their children and their communities.

Our gardens are growing - defying the powers seeking to destroy our villages and consume our lovers and brothers and children. And our hope is rising - breaking through fear and pain to give new life.

It is hard for us to imagine living under such adversity. Let us pray for the people of Columbia and for an end to the violation of human rights and exploitation of the land. Let us pray for peace in Columbia and in all of our world.

Information from the MCC website. Quotes from: "Women of Courage, Our Mothers of Hope", *Women's Concerns Report: Women in Columbia*, May-June 2003, Report No. 167, MCC.

Judith Snowden works for MCC Maritimes. She is on the board of WICC.

May ~ CONSUMERISM WITH A CONSCIENCE

We live in a "product world": we just go to a store and buy what we need. Do we think about who makes these things that we buy? Often, the answer is no. We compare prices to make sure we get the best deal, but we are far removed from where products are made. In many cases, large corporations run the stores where we buy things and there is little, or no, connection to the maker of the product.

Many clothing products are made in sweat-shop conditions in developing countries. In the recent past, many apparel factories that have been located in Mexico, have been moved to Asia, because wages are even lower than Mexican ones. This low-wage situation is exploitive. It takes advantage of poor people who are desperate for employment, and most often these people are women who need money to feed their families.

When we think about this, we ask ourselves "what can we do?" One movement that is trying to make a difference is "Fair Trade", which encourages us to buy ethically-produced goods. This movement is underpinned by our Christian belief that each person should be treated with dignity and enabled to earn a fair wage.

The most common food products with a fair trade label are coffee and tea. It is true that the cost is higher, but we can be certain that the grower gets a fair price and the money is paid up at the time of purchase. This often enables extra dollars to go to a cooperative where money can be put into schooling or housing in the village.

When we buy apparel and toys, we need to think about the origin of the product. Children are often the makers and are engaged in production lines rather than being in school.

What does all this say to us? We can look for the fair trade label on food products. We can look at the label on toys or apparel to see where they are made. We can consult the Maquila Solidarity Network website (www.maquilasolidarity.org) to find out which companies are exploitive and which countries have very lax labour laws. This will help guide us in our buying of these products.

Our buying habits are part of our Christian life; if we truly believe God cares for each of us, we have a responsibility to avoid oppressive practices.

Gracious and loving God, we long for a time where people in the workplace are not exploited. We long for a time when we are not complicit in any discrimination. We ask for insight and discernment in everything that we do... in shopping practices as well as other choices that we make. Be with us and help us in all we do. In the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

Sue Mackay-Smith is a social justice activist and a retired high school teacher. This year, she helped organize a "Fair Trade Fair". She lives in Penticton, B. C.

June ~ DARFUR: LIVING ON THE BRINK OF GENOCIDE

Many Canadians will have heard about the humanitarian catastrophe in Darfur, Sudan. The UN has called it the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, and human rights groups have alleged crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and genocide. The emergency in Darfur presents the starkest challenge to the world since the Rwanda genocide in 1994. A government-backed Arab militia known as *Janjaweed* has been engaging in campaigns to displace and wipe out communities of African tribal farmers.

Villages have been razed, women and girls are systematically raped and branded, men and boys murdered, and food and water supplies targeted and destroyed. Government aerial bombardments support the *Janjaweed* by hurling explosives as well as barrels of nails, car chassis and old appliances from planes to crush people and property. Tens of thousands have died. Well over a million people have been driven from their homes and humanitarian agencies have only limited access.

According to the UN, some 1.2 million people have been forcibly displaced and between 30-50,000 have been killed in attacks or died from displacement-related hunger and disease. An estimated 1,000 are dying daily. The UN Security Council has made some effort to stop the attacks, and international aid agencies are attempting to respond to the needs of the displaced. But still the humanitarian and security situations in the region remain exceedingly tenuous. In late July, a staff-person of the United Church of Canada visited Darfur as part of a Canadian Foodgrains Bank assessment mission, and confirms the desperate situation facing hundreds of thousands of Darfuri.

The roots of the conflict that have produced the crisis in Darfur are complex. There is a peace process but progress has been slow. On July 30, 2004, the UN Security Council passed a resolution giving the government of Sudan 30 days to disarm the *Janjaweed* militia and restore security in Darfur. Yet, by December 2004, the violence in Darfur looked like it would continue.

The United States Agency for International Development estimates that 350,000 people could die. Independent organizations such as *Medecins sans Frontieres* (Doctors without Borders) suggest that, if aid does not reach affected areas, as many as a million people could die.

Pray that emergency aid reaches those in need and that the *Janjaweed* are disarmed and brought under control. Pray that peace will come to Sudan, and that those in the displaced persons camps are able to return home. And pray for healing for those victimized by rape and torture.

Source: www.kairos.org & www.savedafur.org

July ~ FROM THEM TO US: WE ARE THE MENTALLY ILL

"I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you." Is 43:1-2

I saw my neighbour at the store today. She looked all right considering all she has been through with her son. You know, he was in the mental hospital for a while and just came home last week. It's amazing how the family copes. I mean, what do you do? It's really a shame. And such a good looking boy too."

Living with someone who has a mental illness is never easy. Other people's attitudes are just some of the reasons why...

Most people would be surprised to know that in Canada, 1 in 8 people will require hospitalization for a mental disorder at some point in their life; that they will be discharged "better but not well," because the few hospital beds available are needed for more serious cases; that for every Canadian receiving inpatient care at any time, 8 more are treated as outpatients; that at least 25% of the population suffers from mild to moderate depression, anxiety or other forms of mental disorder: that 10% of Canadians consulted a family physician last year about emotional problems.

That's an awful lot of people. That's an awful lot of us... Most people think mental illness is rare. In fact, it is widespread. And, with proper care, 25% of mental disorders do not reoccur and another 30% can be controlled well enough to return to everyday functioning.

Though mental illness is still mysterious and misunderstood, people's attitudes are changing. We can help to overcome the stigmatization of those who are suffering from a mental illness. For example, we can challenge the media when it links violent acts with mental illness. A very small percentage of dangerous acts are committed by those with mental illness.

The good news Jesus brought us was that everyone was invited to the banquet feasts. Jesus welcomed those on the margins in his community. The mentally ill were marginalized then as they are now. Following Jesus' example, we can begin to recognize who is excluded from our tables. Through prayer, invitations to reach out in a just way, public education, medical research, self-help groups, pressure for more effective mental health services, we can make a difference.

Eventually, we may know the joy of seeing our loved ones restored to health. In the meantime, we can recognize the giftedness of those that suffer with mental illness and enhance our own capacity for living.

Adapted from "Coping with Mental Illness in the Family" a pamphlet produced by the Canadian Mental Health Association. Lola Murphy is a WICC council member and therapist living in Wiarton, Ontario.

August ~ FEEDING THE HUNGRY IN NORTH KOREA

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) or North Korea, as this nation of 23 million people is known to us, was divided north and south by the infamous De-Militarized Zone in the early 1950s following the Korean War. It divided two sharply differing ideologies: the South prospered by allowing industry and technology development and close trade relations with the West; the North suffered extreme poverty under a suppressive regime which spent money mostly on weapons. A chronic food shortage, due to the economic collapse following the end of the Soviet Union, their major trading partner, caused North Korea to issue an international appeal for help in 1996.

The Canadian Food Grains Bank (CFGFB) has been responding, with matching funds coming from the Canadian International Development Agency. The CFGFB is a 13-member Christian based charitable organization that collects and distributes Canadian wheat, yellow peas and other agricultural products to the world's hungry. A report on North Korea from the United Nations World Food Program found that 62% of the children under 7 years of age were stunted due to severe malnutrition. However, after several years, delegations from the CFGFB have noted significant improvement in the conditions of children in the orphanages, kindergartens, primary schools and hospitals -- the designated recipients of all CFGFB food aid.

Food shipments are monitored through the Food Aid Liaison Unit (FALU) set up in North Korea by the CFGFB within the World Food Program of the United Nations. Action by Churches Together (ACT) works closely with others to ensure that the food is distributed to those who need it most.

Canada was one of the first countries to establish formal relations with North Korea. A delegation of North Korean agriculturists came to Canada and the issues of peace and re-unification were expressed. A summit between North and South Korea was widely reported in the North Korean press using words as "historic" and "hopeful".

When foreign aid workers were unable to enter the country because of the SARS crisis they found that in South Korea (with a large Christian population) the authorities were remarkably open to the good works of God's people with their neighbours. It is even more important now to continue to assist North Korea in its hunger situation and to encourage it on the quest for peace and reconciliation. Please keep the people of both Koreas in your prayers.

Yoka DeBruijn, a former WICC Council member, lives in Saskatoon, SK.

September ~ PEACE AND CHILDREN

At a recent event, mothers gathered to talk about peace and respond to the questions: "How do you deal with violence on the screen, or newspaper or magazines for your children? How do you tell your children? How did you first hear/learn about wars?"

Most mothers said they choose TV programs and try not to let their children see any violent action or news programs. Then one mother asked the others: "For how long do you not let them see such programs? And how much can we protect our children from these things?"

In terms of their own experience, all the mothers were born in Canada. However, they remember hearing of the Second World War, the Vietnam war, draft dodgers, the Jonestown massacre. After coming to Canada to escape from the war, one German family was called "Nazi". As the mothers discussed their experiences, they concluded that they cannot forever keep their children from seeing the news and violence on TV.

My peace pilgrim journey to Hiroshima, Nanjing (China), Khartoum (Sudan) and Assisi (Italy) encouraged me to see, read and hear the real stories of wars and violence even if they are horrible. I also learned that we have to share these stories. The sharing of stories helps us to learn the reality of wars in a personal way.

"Let all the souls here rest in peace; For we shall not repeat the evil" are the words inscribed on the Memorial monument of Hiroshima. We would like to protect our children from seeing horrible violence, yet they have to learn eventually. We know that children the same age are suffering from violence many places in the world.

It is important that children clearly know that "grandmothers and mothers don't like wars and don't like violence." As we pray for world peace this month, as painful as it is, we have to share our stories about wars and violence.

Canada is a wonderful country of diversity. Many people came to this land from war-torn countries to pursue peace. Many people came as refugees. All of us know and have heard many horrible stories of wars. Some of us experienced it. Some of us visited the places. Our sharing of stories becomes an important peace education. Our education and prayers for peace are vital.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:

Where there is hatred... let me sow love.

Where there is injury... pardon.

Where there is discord... unity

Where there is doubt... faith.

Where there is error... truth.

Where there is despair... hope.

Where there is sadness... joy.

Where there is darkness... light.

Megumi Matsuo Saunders is President Elect of WICC.

October ~ REMEMBERING THE COST OF SLAVERY

In October 2004, while visiting the United Nations offices in Geneva, I stumbled upon an emotionally awesome 32-panel exhibition entitled *Lest We Forget: The Triumph Over Slavery*.

Created by the Schomburg Centre for Research in Black Culture of the New York Public Library in conjunction with UNESCO's "Slave Route Project", *Breaking the Silence*, this travelling exhibition marks the United Nations' proclamation of 2004 as the International Year to Commemorate the Struggle Against Slavery And Its Abolition and also to mark the 200th anniversary of the establishment of Haiti, the first Black republic.

In her remarks at the opening of the exhibition, Ingeborg Breines, Director of the UNESCO Liaison Office, reiterated "the duty to remember this human tragedy in its full enormity."

What was significant for me was that the focus of the exhibition was less on the slaves as victims, less on the devastating trauma they endured, less on their forced migration, less on the subsequent horrors of their forced labour and the brutality of their oppressors. Instead, it showed how these human beings, in the cauldron of their suffering, became "active and creative agents in making their own history, culture and (even) political future", and how they "reshaped their place in history and endeavoured to fashion their own destinies."

Several panels describe family life, culture and social development, their struggle for freedom and especially the crucial role of religion where they "found in the Gospel the liberating and life affirming passages which through their frequent praise meetings they used to sustain them."

The exhibition illustrates two historic processes which continue to affect our contemporary world: first, the huge economic and cultural impact of the slave trade which "laid the foundation for the (enormous) development of (modern) Europe and the Americas"; and secondly, the equally huge impact on Africa, "the simultaneous disruption of (its) economic, political and social life" resulting in the underdevelopment, indeed the undevelopment, of the once highly developed and prosperous civilizations on the African continent, the effects of which continue to this day.

Pray that in the growing international campaign for reparations for African descendants, we do not forget the price paid for the development of our Western world. Pray also that efforts to defeat the contemporary forms of slavery achieve success and that justice flows.

Hazel Campayne is Chair of WICC's Justice and Peace Committee and President of the Ecumenical Network of Women of African Heritage - ENOWAH.

For more information: www.UNESCO.org.

November ~ BANGLADESH: POOR AND POPULOUS

Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan, came into existence in 1971. It is one of the ten most populous countries in the world, estimated at 141 million people in an area of 144,000 sq. km. Of these approximately 83% are Muslim, 16% Hindu and 1% are "other." Thus, the Christian population is small and persecution is real. Pray for God's protection.

The Christian churches have not done well in coming together. But there is a strong movement from the youth towards unity and ecumenical cooperation. Pray that the "old guard" will be open to the winds of the Spirit, coming particularly from the young people. Many of the present leaders are starting to retire and the development of new leaders has not been fostered. Pray that God might provide new leadership.

The government of Bangladesh is faced with overwhelming needs. About a third of the country floods annually during the monsoon rainy season, hampering economic development. Many people are without land. Water pollution leads to disease and contamination of fishing areas. Pray that God would give wisdom and integrity to the government and social service agencies. Pray for political stability and a way to deal with corruption in government and businesses.

In the midst of these difficult situations, Western Christians are seeking to partner with their sisters and brothers in Bangladesh to bring about a higher quality of life. One specific example involves a Micro-Credit Project. Groups of women are being offered small loans in order to begin businesses which generate additional income. Normally these women wouldn't be eligible for a loan from anyone else, other than exorbitant loan sharks. With this loan through the micro-credit program, small groups work together and act as collateral for each other. The loan is repaid over a period of time and the small interest rate charged is used to finance other projects and provide a "risk fund" if things go wrong. One project in Bangladesh has enabled a group of women to make and sell handicrafts and other goods in one of the poorest districts in Dhaka.

Pray that other such projects will provide a means of income for families and hope for the future. For God's plans for Bangladesh are to prosper and not harm them, to give them hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11)

Written by Major Cathie Harris, St. John's NL, with input from her friend, Captain Elizabeth Nelson, Projects Officer in the Social Department of The Salvation Army in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

December ~ FIGHTING AIDS WITH BEADS OF HOPE

The Beads of Hope Campaign was initiated, in large part, as a response to the call from global partners – particularly in Africa – to join them in their efforts to address HIV/AIDS and the impact it is having on their communities and families.

Beading is an important craft for women in many parts of Africa. The pins incorporate the visual image of the international AIDS symbol (a crossed red ribbon). The United Church has contracted with women's groups to make these pins and sell them to use as symbols for this campaign. With the proceeds from the pins, the women, usually affected by HIV/AIDS, will generate income for their families and or their group.

In March 2004, I was one of the 17 women from the United Church of Canada invited to go to Zambia, Africa, on an educational visit to coincide with the Beads of Hope Campaign.

We visited Kara who was counselling in Lusaka, Zambia, where HIV-positive persons were making Beads of Hope pins. Some were taking Anti-retroviral drugs that had been purchased from the sale of the pins. We visited United Church of Canada partners such as "Women for Change", an organization which teaches women income-generating skills such as the making of marketable crafts, farming, carpentry, dressmaking and the running of grain mills. With these skills they are able to feed their families without engaging in high-risk employment. Another partner, the Christian Council of Zambia, is setting up home-based support groups to train, educate and encourage the over-worked caregivers. Considerable effort has been spent on dispelling perceptions and myths and encouraging the use of herbal medicine to help with illnesses associated with HIV/AIDS. The YWCA is training teachers, supervising orphanages and providing high-energy food supplements to the orphans and most vulnerable children. These are only a few examples of the ways the Beads of Hope campaign is helping people, particularly women and children in Zambia.

"If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26 *Good News Bible*). Let us pray for all those who suffer in God's world.

For more information about the Beads of Hope Campaign, visit www.united-church.ca or call 1-800-465-3771.

Marilyn Fortin is a member of WICC. She lives in Stirling, Ontario.

Forging a new Caribbean-Canada connection

North American and Caribbean women are now partners. This decision, made in August 2003 at the Quadrennial Meeting of the World Day of Prayer International Meeting, means that one person will represent this combined region at future WDPIC Quadrennial meetings. Roma Paul, WDPIC representative and chair of WICC's Ecumenical Gatherings Committee, attended a workshop on Oct. 20-24 in Nassau, Bahamas, which explored ways of enhancing this new partnership.

Our workshop began with expectations: as representatives of the Caribbean, the U.S. and Canada, we named our concerns and discussed ways to better support each other.

On the first evening, Melanie Griffin, the Minister of Social Services for the Bahamas, spoke about women in politics. After years of seeking equality, Bahamian women obtained the right to vote in 1962. Currently, women make up 20 per cent of their MPs, 25 per cent of government ministers, and 47 per cent of the Senate. She said they believe in prayer first, followed by action and work.

The next day we explored the common issues of our region: unemployment, family breakdown, poverty, single mothers, domestic violence, and alcohol abuse. Bahamian women are concerned about the young age of single mothers (some as young as 12 years old). Another concern is the hurricanes that hit the Caribbean this year. They were especially devastating for Haiti and Grenada, whose delegates could not attend as they had to focus on more immediate needs such as food, water, shelter, electricity, medication and clothing. We explored the factors which make hurricanes more damaging, such as

climate change, global warming, forecasting errors and poor building construction, and we looked at ways people could make things better. Although the island of Grenada was totally immobilized by the damage, people on the neighbouring island of Barbados raised \$1 million in two days to assist their sister island. One does not have to look too far to see the caring spirit of the Caribbean people.

We then looked at a case study of the extreme poverty in Haiti and Guyana. At present, there is no system for accountability of their government, church, or leaders. The facilitator pointed out that we should refrain from using the term "poor people"; rather, we should refer to "people living in poverty conditions". She stated that "people are impoverished and prostituted by systems and society".

The guest speaker that evening was Rubie Nottage, Chancellor of the Anglican Diocese of the Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Islands, and professor of Law at the College of the Bahamas. She spoke about Bahamian laws that affect women. Prior to 2002, the laws of inheritance stated that, if parents died intestate, ownership of the property would automatically pass to the eldest son.

Our workshop concluded with a talk by Sonia Brown, an electrical engineer and chair of the PACE Foundation (Providing Alternatives in Career Education). This foundation helps young mothers complete their education, keep themselves and their children healthy, and find employment. PACE is currently fund raising to build a home for them.

This new connection with the Caribbean women is exciting for us! The women are keenly interested in and dedicated to WDP. I found the Christian love and caring apparent in the Caribbean women who attended the workshop. Of the 16 islands of the Caribbean which have WDP committees, we in Canada have agreed to forge stronger connections with St. Maarten, Haiti, Bahamas, Jamaica, Turks and Caicos, and St. Kitts/Nevis. We are so blessed to be in partnership with them. One of our leaders quoted a Spanish saying which is so appropriate: "Walker, walker, there is no road; the road is made by walking". My hope is that we will walk together for many years to come to make that new road!

Roma Paul
Chair, Ecumenical Gatherings
Committee of WICC



WICC held a party for its youngest "members" at Fall Council. Shown are new council member Laura Lockhart (left) with her daughter Emily, and Communications Committee Chair Anna Greenwood-Lee with her daughter Ava.

Welcome & Farewell



WICC also wished a fond farewell to two retiring members. Yoka DeBruijn (left) was an appointee from the Presbyterian church, and Jocelyn Rait was WICC's ICFLC representative.

Council news

Three new council members attended their first council meeting in November:



Laura Lockhart, who lives in Dryden, Ontario, is a United Church minister and mother of a new baby, Emily.



Sue MacKay-Smith, a retired teacher and social activist, lives in Penticton, British Columbia.



Lynn Smart lives in Toronto and chairs the Festival Day Committee of the Women's Inter-Church Council of Toronto.

Council commits to racial justice

The UN World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, in 2001 became a catalyst for more intensive work on racism in the churches. The Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network was formed following the UN Conference in order to organize for long-term change in Canadian church organizations and to support those working to bring about racial justice in the churches. WICC was one of the founding groups of this network.

WICC is engaged in social justice for women, and works to educate and encourage churches to adopt appropriate actions in response to crucial issues affecting women. Issues of gender discrimination, such as poverty and violence, intersect with those of racial discrimination to further marginalize women and make them more vulnerable. This policy for racial justice is one way that WICC is making intentional its commitment



Gwyn Griffith led a workshop on the racial justice policy at Fall Council.

and being faithful to God's call to walk humbly and seek justice along the way.

The racial justice policy is available on WICC's website.

This excerpt outlines WICC's commitment as an organization:

◆ to examine our own structures, policies and practices so that they promote racial justice; and to implement anti-racism training and study with all Council members.

◆ to increase our efforts to invite women of all races into the membership of WICC and to provide leadership development opportunities without discrimination.

◆ to ensure that all our resources reflect the experience and perspectives of racially diverse women.

◆ to support groups that are addressing issues of racial justice in our grant allocation.

◆ to develop and implement a procedure for dealing with racism and racial discrimination within the organization and its membership.

Fall Council *continued from page 1*

◆ **International conference reports:** Two council members and a staff member attended international events this past fall. Joceyln Rait, who has just finished her term as WICC's Representative to the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin, reported on the recent ICFLC meeting held in New York, as well as plans for next year's 50th anniversary celebrations to be held in Malaysia. Roma Paul, WICC's Representative to the World Day of Prayer International Committee, reported on the recent workshop held in the Bahamas which focused on the ways Caribbean countries could partner more effectively with Canada and the United States as a new combined WDP regional group. Program Coordinator Norah McMurtry reported on the World Council of Churches' consultation she attended in New York, on the topic "Women's Voices and Visions on Being Church". This was one of five regional meetings following up on issues from the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women. A

report will be made to the 9th WCC Assembly in Brazil in 2006.

◆ **New publications:** The summer 2004 issue of *Making Waves*, "Naming Racism: Speaking Truth to Power", has been lauded as a helpful resource for groups and individuals who are addressing racism in church and society. *Healing Waters: Churches Working to End Violence Against Women*, published this past spring, has also been well-received. Copies can be ordered from the WICC office.

◆ **Upcoming:** Program Coordinator Norah McMurtry has been part of the planning committee for the bilingual Women Doing Theology conference, to be held in Montreal June 9 – 12, 2005, on the theme "Creating Justice, Recognizing Differences". More information can be found on WICC's website at www.wicc.org.

◆ **Future plans:** WICC has recently agreed to host the WDPIC Quadrennial Meeting in 2007. Planning is already underway for the event, which will be held in Toronto.

WICC Resources

✓ **Healing Waters: Churches Working to End Violence Against Women**

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)*

164 pgs \$25

✓ **Some Women Amazed Us**

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)*

114 pgs \$27

✓ **Starting with Women's Lives, Changing Today's Economy** An 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)*

94 pgs \$15

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