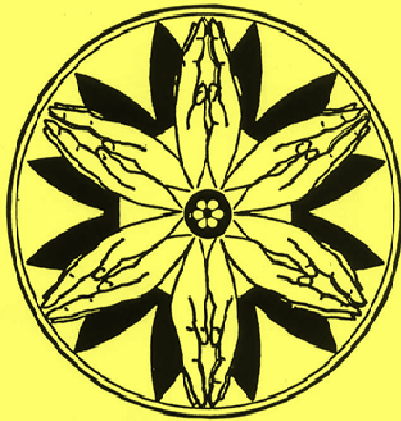


CIRCLE OF PRAYER

*"Join
Our Hearts
in Prayer"*



*Many pairs of hands folded in prayers
reach out to touch the whole earth.*

VOLUME NINETEEN

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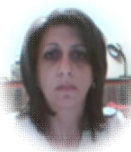
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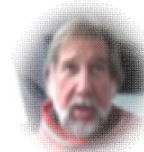
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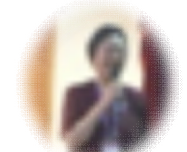
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CIRCLE OF PRAYER
VOLUME NINETEEN

JOINING OUR HEARTS IN PRAYER

Devotional thoughts and prayers to be used when participating in The Fellowship of the Least Coin

Prepared by

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE
for
THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE LEAST COIN

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Founder

PRAYER OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE LEAST COIN

O loving Creator, we present ourselves in your divine presence to thank you for all the bountiful gifts of life. We are especially grateful for the Fellowship of the Least Coin which binds us together in love and forgiveness around the globe. Free us from all doubts and prejudices, we pray. Inspire us to live in solidarity with humankind that we may know the joy of giving and receiving.

Dear God, accept this least coin "token of love." Make us mindful of the miracles of these coins. Let us honor your creation with love, as shown through the life, death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus the Christ.

Amen.

You are Invited

to

participate with Christian Women
of every continent in

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE LEAST COIN

THE BASIS OF BELONGING

concern for
justice, peace, and reconciliation,
intercession for those in special need of God's grace.

THE TOKEN PARTICIPATION

a "Least Coin" set aside by the individual as each prayer is offered. These "least coins" are contributed annually to a common Fund from which grants are given in the name of Christian women throughout the world. There is no attempt to determine the amount of coins from any country, and it is important for this fund to be used for ministries of mercy in every continent. The Fellowship of the Least Coin creates Christian community among those of different national, racial, cultural, economic and religious backgrounds and supports Programs which work for justice and peace throughout the world.

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FOREWORD

Once again, the ICFLC affirms the importance of *Circle of Prayer* which reminds of **prayer as the vital element of the FLC movement, followed by the setting aside of least coin**. Every FLC woman—young or not so young; rural, suburban, urban; poor or rich; of different race and continent—is invited to connect with other women of the world using the *Circle of Prayer* as a meditation guide. We are called to “join our hearts in prayer.”

When the ICFLC Working Committee on *Circle of Prayer XIX* met during the 2007 Annual Meeting, they chose a theme which has become very timely for our contexts as women of today. Our contexts are characterized by crises. Responses can be of fear, uncertainty, despair, mistrust and many negative feelings. But our faith in God guides us to join our hearts in prayer. In solidarity, women can find strength. We are not alone. God is with us. Our sisters round the world are with us in prayer. Our least coins when gathered and sent tell of our love for God and for women and children. We meet crisis with courage and say, “we join our hearts with Jesus in prayer,” “we join our hearts with FLC women in prayer.” The Scripture continues to be a living word for us women:

A) Jeremiah 29: 11-13 NRSV

“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray for me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart.”

B) Philippians 4: 5-7 NRSV

“Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to

God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

C. Philippians 1: 3-6 NRSV

‘I thank my God every time I remember you, ‘constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ‘because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. ‘I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.”

D. Matthew 12: 34b

“ . . . For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”

We are grateful to the meditation writers from different countries who have shared their experiences and biblical reflections. Their experiences tell of the many contexts and struggles women have—the differences and similarities. Their biblical reflections and testimonies tell of the great love of God which empowers, liberates and sustains women.

We are grateful to Fran Bartlett, our editor, and Joanne Instance, who did computer compilation. They both continue to faithfully serve God and FLC movement through the years. Praise God!

Corazon T. Reyes

ICFLC Executive Secretary

INTRODUCTION

We are part of God’s community of believers. We are sisters created in a beautiful diversity and tapestry of skin tones, hair and eye colors, size and shapes. But within each of us there is a heart beating, giving life to our bodies.

Community comes as we reach out in love---as we extend ourselves through caring and embracing one another in a common bond of love and acceptance, hope and bearing each others burdens, giving and receiving emotional and spiritual support. This special community connected through the *Circle of Prayer* brings us together and provides a sense of belonging despite the individual circumstances or the many miles that may separate us.

Jesus calls us into reconciling ministries through his examples of blessing young children. He celebrated their gifts and upheld their worth. As the child gave the loaves and fishes the gift was acceptable and more than enough. No gift is too small in God’s community. The woman at the well was treated with respect and Jesus recognized her as one capable of giving. He did not require proof of righteousness or worth, he served and he prayed.

We join our hearts with the widow who gave without hesitation. And we join our hearts in prayer for each other and for all our sisters and brothers around the world. Our circle invites everyone in and no one is excluded. May God bless our loving outreach.

Gail Mengel

CWU USA President 2004-2008

SHANTI SOLOMON MEMORIAL 2008

NABOTH is a small-scale farmer, in peace with his inheritance of a vineyard. Not so Ahab. Ahab, in spite of his kingly riches, wants to grab Naboth's inheritance and add it to his own. Ahab offers money for it or a better vineyard elsewhere. These are tempting offers. Naboth weighs the options carefully. He is a simple man. He works his vineyard with his own hands and is apparently satisfied with the yield. Naboth decides to retain his inheritance which he cherishes, and asks the king not to dispossess him. The king is rich, flaunts his money-power, but, because of his greed, loses all appetite for food and spends sleepless nights, which he cannot fulfill due to Naboth's refusal. Naboth's refusal is an open challenge to money-power. Today's man of small means is overwhelmed with quick-money dream of the speculative type. It does not take long for the stock-market to melt down and reveal its ugly face. Factories close down; pink slips fly thick and fast. Thousands lose jobs. Traditional artisans take to alternative sources of livelihood. A man kills his pregnant wife and hangs himself in Mumbai. Another kills himself in Agartala, unable to bear the shock in finding his entire savings in stock-holdings wiped out overnight. These happen on 21st October. Seven days later a stock-broker kills himself in Hyderabad. Farmers, unable to repay loan, committing suicide by the dozen, and yet others whose land is acquired to set up special economic zones make another story.

When there is conflict between individuals or families or social groups or nations, there are possibilities of dialogue, scope for reconciliation. What is there when the investor with a human face confronts a faceless market meltdown? How does a dialogue take place between the two? Where is any scope for reconciliation? Shanti Solomon joined an ecumenical international team of women of Presbyterian Church of the USA and visited, 52 years ago, the war-torn areas of North - East Asia. They carried a message of peace and reconciliation to the war-devastated families. Shanti's experience was that war and bombing and violence were too big matters for individuals to

deal with; and yet, she discovered that it was from individuals that wars started. Greed in the human heart was the starting block. Getting people to turn to peace in their own situations became her agenda and in due course the mission of the Fellowship of the Least Coin.

The financial meltdown and fear of recession and also debt burden keep terrorizing people everywhere. Churches in some lands feel people must be helped in these crises situation. This is a new area of ministry. As we remember Shanti on her 10th death anniversary let us search our hearts. We will at once see how greed lays its hold on us - greed for money, greed for position, greed for power. Naboth was firm in holding on to his inheritance which was invaluable in his sight. Christ gives us a priceless spiritual inheritance. Are we able, Naboth - like, to exercise our option in favour of our spiritual inheritance? In it alone individuals may find peace of mind.

The relevance of the Fellowship of the Least Coin grows day by day.

(Mrs.) Ujjala Biswas

B 171/106 Shalimar Garden II
Sahibabad 201005, GZB, UP
INDIA

Again my candle burns

My candle burns for peace...again!
again
with warmth
and
light
so true
again my candle burns
a safe and tranquil space
this night
I pray
again
for you
againforyouagainforyouagainforyou!
I pray again for you...
and candles burn...again

by *Sonny Allinson*

I WILL LISTEN TO YOU

By Iris Ford, Canada

Jeremiah 29: 11- 13

This passage from Jeremiah 29: 11- 13 has always been a favourite with me, it is so reassuring. Back in 1987 I wrote these verses on the inside cover page of a new Bible to remind me of the Lord's closeness and guidance. It has the same strong reassurance as does Proverbs 3: 5, 6. "In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct and make straight your path." The problem is in acknowledging God daily as our Lord and Saviour, before we become too busy and preoccupied.

Now, 21 years later, I wonder what were those plans the Lord had for me back then? Can I see them now as I look back? Are they outlined clearly in my memory, or did I get lost along the way, immersed in what I wanted to do? I had left Ontario and moved West, tired out and in pain after surgery for a broken hip. I needed to take a year off from pastoral ministry and also wanted to do some writing, so I rented a picker's cottage on a fruit orchard. At this fork in the road I wrote in my Bible, "What is the future God has planned? Well, that one book, written in that picker's cottage, led to five more being published.

During that physical and spiritual respite, I opened the back door every morning to see a pail of fruit - peaches, grapes, apricots waiting for me, a wonderful gift from the owner of the orchard! God was indeed providing in many ways as that time off in the picker's cottage prospered my soul and renewed my faith for further ministry ahead. That path took me back into pastoral ministry and another building program. But now, 14 years later and in retirement, I wonder about God's plans for me now, plans to give me hope and a future. Being a retiree and sort of 'on the shelf' makes me tend to look back rather than looking ahead. Then, as I pray, the Lord checks me with the assurance that my future is still planned by no less than my God. God is even now directing my way and making my paths straight... Yes, even at this senior age, there are 'plans to prosper me and not to harm me, plans to give me hope and a future'.

Every senior needs to be aware that God is still listening when we call to him, and as we pray and seek the Lord we WILL find Him.

But there is a catch, we need to seek Him with ALL our hearts and be a righteous person (James 5:16) It isn't just any old prayer or any 'old' pray-er that is effective, it must come from the heart of a righteous person. Righteous means being in God's will. So one's prayer must start: 'Lord, forgive me for my sin, and restore a right relationship between us.' The prayer from a forgiven and loving heart is powerful and effective.

There is another catch to our prayers being really powerful, sure that God is listening. It is when two or three agree on a need and pray about it that such a pray is answered - as Matthew 18: 20 reminds us. It is when we gather in the love and forgiveness of the Holy Spirit and share our concerns together, that the Lord listens. Indeed God promises to be there among us! WOW.

Where are your close friends? Near home or all over the world? Prayer is a bond that covers the world. So, sisters in Christ, let's pray together about the needs placed on our hearts and hear God saying: I am listening.

Prayer: Oh Lord, our God, we humbly ask you to bind us together in your love. Forgive us where we have failed you and followed our own paths. Lead us, dear Lord, to a prayer partner or two, that together we may talk clearly with you of the needs that are brought to us. They are great, Lord, and we need your directions on how to walk the road you have for us. Lord, we know you are listening through the Spirit of Jesus. Thank you, dear Jesus. AMEN.

***Iris Ford** is a retired minister of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, living in Parksville, Vancouver Island. Iris has written several books on the Christian Faith Journey and is presently doing research for another manuscript, this time on the Lost Healing Ministry of Jesus. She attends St. Columba Presbyterian Church, and chairs the Women's Missionary Society.*

THE REVOLUTION JESUS SOUGHT FOR WOMEN

By Christine Shepherd, England

John 4: 4-30 Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

The very fact that we have any women's group separately from men should give us pause for thought, and make us sad. If there's one thing in the Gospels that comes out loud and clear from Jesus' dealings with women, it is that He doesn't usually deal with women as such. He deals with people in their situations. It is the gospel writers who seem to distinguish them and make them characteristically female: for Him, it is the humanity of each person He meets that is the important thing. After all, for St Paul, 'In Christ there is no east or west, no male or female...'

I think people generally don't realise how revolutionary Jesus was with regard to gender. Because of the layers of sexist awareness in the centuries since, because so quickly women were re-delegated their weaker role, we forget the breathtaking newness of His attitudes. He allows Mary and Martha to talk to Him as though they were not subservient at all, and how Martha takes Him on when Lazarus dies! How direct they are allowed to be and how He defends them against others!

But it was only when His revolutionary stance with regard to the story of the Samaritan Woman at the well was pointed out to me that I took this in. The layers of prejudice, culture, custom, taboo are so thick here; on about 5 different levels Jesus and the woman weren't supposed to speak to each other at all – yet to us, used to strangers politely greeting each other or chatting, this doesn't normally come across.

The Samaritan woman was a fallen woman with a shady, indeed rather racy, past: but she was aware of this, and felt self-conscious, or she would not have gone to the well in the hottest part of the day. All other women, whom she seems to have shunned, would go at dawn or dusk. So, she assumes she will be alone. But on arrival she finds that there is a Man already at the well. No matter; each will pretend the other does not exist. She should not speak to any respectable man anyway. Moreover, he is a Jew – of the antagonistic purer race. Moreover, he is a rabbi, clearly. Moreover, he may well know who SHE is.

So she naturally doesn't want to attract any attention and confidently expects that he will ignore her, as is fitting. So imagine the earth-shattering nature of his mild request – 'could you get me a drink, please?' As if she were a normal human being! As if SHE could do something to help HIM!

The theological discussion which follows, (which must have been reported by her later, after her life has been given back to her in confidence and love), is an important discussion, but the fact that it takes place at all is what should shatter any prejudice in the Christian church pro or anti any gender.

This encounter makes it clear that for Jesus there is no difference between men and women in the importance of the soul – the need, the humanity.

But oh, what a way we have had of following our leader on this one, as on so many issues! Such struggling we have had through the centuries, both in and outside the church, and so often delegated to a minor role.

Let me confess: it has not been hard for me to be a woman and a Christian. I am now a Reader, and I teach RE. But in my mother's life I see portrayed how faith and life were often a struggle.

She left Germany in 1932; growing up with the privations of the aftermath of the first World War was hard, watching the sufferings caused by poverty and an over-demanding father, and being the 3rd of 4 girls, feeling unwanted because she was not a boy (ironically the one boy then born would be killed in the next war.) There was no money and no education, which she craved, so she escaped to England before Hitler had even taken power, working as an *au pair*. Lonely and longing for certainties, she was converted in the evangelical missionary blaze of the '30s, though it didn't make loneliness and guilt better. She went to a missionary training college in London, but while working in a hotel in Eastbourne to get some money to finance that training, she met my father, who persuaded her to marry him. Imagine marrying an Englishman in 1938! Imagine the wrath of the Principal who had had my mother in mind for the mission field in China at that time! And the wrath of the parents-in-law, who hoped she would take my father with her and were disappointed by his total lack of commitment...

No wonder my mother felt that God was punishing her when the

war broke out. It brought not so much physical privations as mental anguish and torture. Two little boys were born; while the father-in-law muttered darkly about 'those wretched Huns – they killed my brother' she waited in terror to find out what had happened to her own family.

She eventually found out, through the Red Cross, that her beloved mother had died, quite young: and the only brother had been killed on the Russian front. She remained wounded by these events the rest of her life. Always foreign, always homesick, always trying to hide her accent, she struggled with her faith too. Had not God brought punishment on her because she had not heeded his call, as made clear in the principal's behest?

Marriage in those days, too, without recourse to work outside the house, was a different proposition. My father, like all in his generation, expected food on the table, children in bed, and a tidy house on his return from work. They often annoyed each other!

So how did my mother cope? As far as I can tell, she relied heavily on prayer. I remember her telling me how she begged for help one day in the war, when the parents-in-law were being particularly difficult and her husband no support, and she longed to go home but could not because her family were on the other side of the war. She simply said 'Help!' and the answer came, 'I'll keep you going for today. Tomorrow, ask again.' And so, one day at a time, she got through.

What special prayers should there be for women? We are NOT the same as men. We have different choices to make. The demands of marriage, and the demands of children, mean that our lives are differently shaped. Sacrifice is a dirty word these days, and yet we may have to make it on occasion, and may need grace to accept that the general 'because I'm special' culture fails to take into account the needs of others. How will we shape our future? What does God want of us, clever, successful beings that we women are?

For all these things, we need prayer: getting on the Internet of God, connecting to the server and holding each other up in the light and warmth of Jesus.

Prayer: God our Father, help us to discover what it is You want us to be. As women, we find our role in our own culture,

enthuse us with Your love, with your desire for us to have 'fullness of life' and with the spirit of dedication and self-sacrifice that we may need. AMEN.

***Christine Shepherd** is a Reader in the Church of England, a mother of four teen-agers, takes care of elderly parents, a teacher off and on for many years and at present is in a small girls' school in Droitwich.*

A HEART FULL OF THANKS

By Nop Sophally, Cambodia

Sing

1. Oh! Je-sus Christ is true God, our won-der- ful- ly kind Lord;
(twice)
For no one else can save us and fill dark hearts with sun – light.
Je – sus Name praise, Oh! How love – ly is our Lord.
2. Oh! Je – sus love is so deep, he came to die in our stead;
(twice)
He gave him – self as ran – som, to bring an end to death's power.
Je – sus Name praise, Oh! How love – ly is our Lord.
3. Oh! Je – sus will - ing – ly died, but God the Fa – ther raised him; (twice)
His Spir – it turns our lives round to pass from death to new life.
Je – sus Name praise, Oh! How love – ly is our Lord.

Philippians 1: 3-6

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to all the organizations that still work in my poor country Cambodia and around the world. I thank the Lord that you chose us to be your disciples, and we're to become your body by your perfect love unto us, that we can have communication and fellowship with each other.

The great guidance of God makes me have a strong faith and braveness to work with women in society to help people who have problems with poverty.

- To let people know the truth and light of the world.
- To take out the violence of husband and wife.
- To encourage the women of the Church who have compassion to work with street kids, with children orphaned by drugs and HIV/AIDS and to encourage
- those who care for their needs.

I thank God for all the volunteers – always in every prayer of mine, for your fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now. I thank all of you who have compassion, mercy and grace for the poor and oppressed.

- I praise you Lord for you are the Creator of the World
- I praise you Lord! For you created man and woman in your own image.
- I praise you Lord for your Golden Rule.

Thank you God, that you loved us so much that you sent your only Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, to live and die and rise again from the death that we might believe and have your Grace and everlasting life,

Thank you, God for your Gospel and for your guidance as we pray and learn.

***Mrs. NOP SOPHALLY** is member of Women Fellowship on Saturday. She was born on June 22, 1958 in Kampot Province, Cambodia.*

EVERY BREATH

By Yasuko Nakayama, ACWC-Japan

The first breath was given to you right after birth by God the Creator, and the last breath will be received by God who carries one's life to eternity.

I have learned to watch the breath of people especially by the bedside of a sick person. The breath of each person changes from time to time - in haste, in anger, in worry, in anxiety, in peace, in joy. When people are seriously sick in bed, they are lonely, desperate, fearful and/or anxious. Even in the stage of coma people need to be attended by someone who cares for them – and that is indeed true for dying people. If one would be able to adjust with the coma person it would give the person a feeling of being attended.

There are many people dying alone in Japan. About 80% die in institutions or hospital. On the other hand most people wish to die at home being watched by his/her loved ones. Not many institutions are spiritually conscious for the dying. In many cases family members are told to go out of the room so the doctors and nurses can do their “business.” The last breath of the beloved family member is the most important time, however, when the family wishes to be together. The dying person is left in the room all alone at the last breath in cases where he/she has no relative to visit. The nursing station has a monitor to watch the vitals of the patient and when it shows something happened the patient will receive the visit of the nurse to check the vitals and the death will be declared at that time. Nobody will be standing by the dying person in such cases to actually “be with the patient”.

Singing a song matching to the patient's breath is a useful tool to comfort the patient. Not my breath but to match the patient's breath is important. When I talk to someone who is in the anxious stage I concentrate to watch the person's breath and to breathe with the same pace or sing a song with the same pace of the patient's breath. Then the person feels the attention sensing the air with his/her sense of touch. I talk to the patient when he/she exhales. That manner gives the patient a safe and calm atmosphere since it is natural of human being to talk on the exhale.

The word “Yahweh” is to be considered as inhale on “Yah” and

exhale with “weh” when the word is uttered.

Psalm 139 *“Lord, you have searched my heart,
and you know when I sit and when I stand.*

.....
*“When my bones were being formed,
carefully put together in my mother’s womb,
when I was growing there in secret,
you knew that I was there –*

.....
*“Find out if there is any evil in me
and guide me in the everlasting way.*

Prayer:

Father of grace and mercy,

Hear my prayer through my daily breath.

Help me to speak your word and not of my word or ego.

Your word will lead me when it is used for speaking and
singing for the needy.

Help us to know every breath is yours. Keep my breath under
your control, O Lord.

Help us to remember all the breath we take is yours
especially when we feel it goes out of control. For it is You
who started my first breath and who takes care of my last
breath.

In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen

Yasuko Nakayama *is an ecumenical leader from Japan, a
musician, and a past member of the International Committee for
the Fellowship of the Least Coin.*

FAITH AND SERVICE

By Jenny Muschamp, New Zealand

Philippians 1:3-6

“Everything we do should be a reflection of the Image of God.”

With our Hearts Joined in Prayer we need to thank women like
Shanti Solomon for the vision in uniting women together
regardless of their country or economic circumstances.

Recently I met a lady from Ireland who was severely disabled and
her Faith in the Lord was amazing. She had travelled around the
world to speak to Christian Women like ourselves on her belief in
the Lord through Prayer. She has been in many difficult
situations where she needed to put her life in God’s hands. And
only through her trust in God has she been able to overcome
these situations.

*“True prayer is not to be found in the words of the mouth but in the
thoughts of the heart.”*

The Patron Saint of the Catholic Women’s League, Saint
Margaret Clitherow was the wife of a butcher who died when she
refused to renounce the Catholic faith. She kept a small room to
hide priests from persecution but was arrested, tried and crushed
to death on March 25 1586. She was made a Saint in 1970.

This was one of her prayers:

“I am fully resolved in all things touching my Faith,

which I ground upon Jesus Christ,

and by Him I steadfastly believe to be saved . . .

and by God's assistance I mean to live and die in the same Faith;

for if an angel come from Heaven,

and preach any other doctrine than we have received,

the Apostle biddeth us not believe him.

I die for the love of my Lord Jesus.”

The Catholic Women's League use 'Faith and Service' as their motto.

“Blessed are those who give without remembering and receive without forgetting.”

God has given each of you some special abilities; be sure to use them to help each other, passing on to others God's many kinds of Blessings.”

1 Peter 4:10

Jenny Muschamp is the Christchurch Diocesan President of the Catholic Women's League. She is a widow with three adult daughters.

A THANKFUL HEART

By Esther Kilaghbian, Lebanon

Philippians 4:6-7: *“Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking Him with a thankful heart. And God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus”.*

A thankful heart ...that's what we need every minute of our lives. A thankful heart ... that's what God is waiting to see in us anytime. A thankful heart ... that's what will give direction to our spiritual growth.

The Apostle Paul knew that in His days and in any day, people will have difficulty in not worrying. So, he advises us not to worry but instead ask God and pray with a thankful heart. Then, we ask ourselves, for what should we be thankful, for the natural disasters, for the turmoil, for the wars, for the economic crisis, for the health problems, for the disagreements and conflicts? As women living in Lebanon, we have seen and are still experiencing much and have many reasons not to be thankful...but God gives us the challenge to be different than others as Christian women. The woman who has a thankful heart helps her family to be like her and focuses their attention on all the blessings they have. She can also be an example to others. Why should we have a thankful heart?

1. WE should have a thankful heart because God has given His Son, Jesus Christ for our redemption.
2. WE should have a thankful heart because we can experience God's presence in our lives.
3. We should have a thankful heart because our lives are full of blessings.
4. WE should have a thankful heart because we are privileged to be called God's children and He uses us for His Kingdom.
5. WE should have a thankful heart because God is with us

always.

Every time you pass through difficult situations, try to find reasons to be thankful and pray with a thankful heart, only then your problem will grow smaller compared to your blessings. From the bottom of my heart, I thank God for giving His peace to me to be able to conquer any difficulty and I am sure today you have many things to be thankful for. Take your problems and difficult situations to God in prayer. Let's join our thankful hearts in prayer, wherever we are and whatever situation we're in.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, the source of every blessing, I praise you for your abundant love and continuing presence. Forgive us Lord when we don't share your love with others. Help us be faithful and obedient to you and to Your Word. Remind us every day to have a thankful heart and give us your peace which transcends human understanding. In Jesus' name. AMEN.

Esther Kilagbian is the current Chairperson of the ICFLC. She is pastor's wife living in Beirut, Lebanon and mother of a son and a daughter. She serves in the church, in the school and in the community with her God-given abilities. She likes music, visitations, spending time with people of different ages and cooking.

HOPE FOR THE AFRICAN WOMEN

By Vivi Akakpo, Togo

Isaiah 43: 19

Behold, I am doing a new thing, now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

Together with all the African women we join our hearts in prayer believing and trusting God that a new day is coming for us in Africa as the passage quoted from Isaiah 43: 19 is mentioning it.

The African continent is faced with numerous challenges and women and children are the most vulnerable. Although we celebrate the reduction of conflicts, wars and political upheavals in Africa, the current challenges of extreme poverty, environmental degradation, food crisis, financial crunch, just to mention a few, are leaving the majority of African women wondering about the future of their beloved continent and of their offspring, wondering about how that promise of God to do new things will be fulfilled in the life of a continent where some people have lost hope for a better and brighter future, a continent that is called by all kinds of names.

The Word of God however, is alive and true. Therefore we want to claim that Word of God, trusting that the Almighty in all faithfulness will do a new thing for our continent and that it will spring forth very soon. Our eyes will see it and our mouths will confess it. We will not leave a broken continent to future generations but our children will have a course to smile and be proud of a beautifully endowed and blessed continent as we live not by what we are seeing but by what the Word of God says.

Our God is still a miracle-working God, a Creator and Restorer and will do for the African continent exceedingly and abundantly more than we asked for and thought of. The God who transformed the lives of Ruth, Naomi, Esther, Sarah, Abigail and many others is the same God today and forever and will

certainly transform our lives and our continent.

Prayer:

Heavenly Creator, Maker of everything seen and unseen, the Alpha and Omega, we praise your Holy name for who You are and for your faithfulness in the lives of the African women and our continent.

We pray for all the women of Africa who are bearing the brunt of conflicts and everyday challenges and wondering about the future of their continent. We pray that in your grace and mercy You will give them to believe in your Word that says that You will make a new thing in their lives. Give them Lord courage and faith in the midst of difficulties.

We pray that You will be the God of our children and the entire continent of Africa so that our continent will be blessed as promised in your Word: Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.

We give you every bit of ourselves and of our continent, its past, present and future and believe that you will take every experience and turn it around for the good of mother Africa. In Jesus' name we pray with thanksgiving. Amen!

Vivi Akakpo is the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) Women's Programme Officer. She worked many years with refugees across the continent and has a special interest in the advocacy of forgotten refugee crisis and situations. She comes from Togo.

PRAYING FOR THE ELDERLY

By Naw Calista Min, Myanmar

Ps 91:16

"I will reward them with long life. I will save them".

Ps 92: 12-14

"The righteous will flourish like palm trees, they will grow like the cedars of Lebanon. They still bear fruit in old age and are always green and strong."

I served as chair person of Myanmar Council of Churches Women's Department (1992 to 1996). In the year 1999, The International Year of Older Persons, by the grace of God, I had a good opportunity to participate at the "Workshop on the Role of Older Women in Development" in Mekong Basin Countries held at Novotel Hotel, Chang Mai, Thailand from 15-19 February, 1999, sponsored by UNIFEM. This was my first experience of participating in international activities and prompted me to help in the Help Age International Program.

At the end of the workshop (we from Myanmar) put up the plan of Action for Myanmar. Since then every year on October 1st, we EPID Committee organize and celebrate the "International Day of Older Persons"

In Myanmar there are two kinds of programs for the Elderly Persons. The first program is the Volunteer Based Home Care for Older persons who are poor, frail and lonely which is sponsored by Help Age Korea and this program continues to grow now and the mission is quite a successful one. The whole purpose of the project is to provide service by volunteer to elderly individuals who are experiencing problems in living due to physical and emotional limitations, and to provide the support and help required by the elderly to maintain a healthy community life style.

The second is the active healthy ageing by participating in the Development program which is one of the Myanmar Council of

Churches programs. The whole purpose of this program is to motivate the healthy elderly to participate in the development program, to educate the people for intergenerational cooperation.

Please pray for Older Persons in Myanmar who need care and also for those healthy ageing to be able to participate in the development program.

Prayer: Gracious Father, we are grateful for your mercy and kindness for all creatures, especially for the poor, frail and lonely ones. Bless those who share in the kind works for humanity on this earth. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray.

Naw Calista Min (Retd) is Coordinator (Honorary) of the Elderly Persons In Development Program (EPID) of the Myanmar Council of Churches.

PEACE THROUGH PRAYER

By Maral Deyirmenjian, Lebanon

Philippians 4: 5-7

"Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Worry had become a natural part of my daily life in Lebanon.

I remember I was graduating from elementary school when the civil war started. We did not have a graduation ceremony; our diplomas were handed out at the school's courtyard while we were standing in a row...

This went on for years. I did not even have a commencement ceremony when I graduated from college, again, because of the war. On the day of my wedding, there was a general strike and different parties were burning tires on the streets.

When uncertainty, fear, and insecurity surround you, worry seems to be the only way of feeling in control...

Probably this feeling of insecurity has driven me towards God. He has proven to me, time and time again, that He can be trusted, and that He cares and is in control of my life no matter

Strength & Courage

It takes strength to be firm.
It takes courage to be gentle.
It takes strength to stand guard.
It takes courage to let down your guard.
It takes strength to conquer.
It takes courage to surrender.
It takes strength to be certain.
It takes courage to have doubt.
It takes strength to fit in.
It takes courage to stand out.
It takes strength to feel a friend's pain.
It takes courage to feel your own pain.
It takes strength to hide your own pains.
It takes courage to show them.
It takes strength to endure abuse.
It takes courage to stop it.
It takes strength to stand alone.
It takes courage to lean on another.
It takes strength to love.
It takes courage to be loved.
It takes strength to survive.
It takes courage to live.

Author Unknown

what.

God has taught me to be strong, to have courage in face of danger and uncertainty. I have read the following lines and love how the author presents the difference between courage and strength:

God has equipped me with courage through prayer. I have learned (very slowly) "to cast my anxieties on God" while praying and enjoy His peace. Moreover, I have been able to transmit this sense of peacefulness and courage to others.

Two years ago, when Lebanon was being bombarded by airplanes, a friend wrote, "The resourcefulness of one will be the strength of the other, and the message of one will be the story of another."

I hope our messages of peace in words or in acts will change another's life. It will give strength and hope for the future because our God is good and He is near for those who trust Him.

Maral Deyirmenjian is currently Principal of Armenian Evangelical Central High School-Beirut, Lebanon having had her BS in Nursing and Masters in Public Health at American University of Beirut. She also has Diploma in Theological Studies from Near East School of Theology.

LA PAZ QUE DIOS NOS DA

(Original in Spanish)

By Nora Geymonat Armand Hugón, Uruguay

Filipenses 4: 6-7

Esta mañana me visitaron Gerardo y sus compañeros. Gerardo es mi hijo mayor, que vive en un hogar para personas con capacidades diferentes, ya que es epiléptico y de bajo cociente intelectual. Con su sonrisa amplia, disfrutaron de los animales de la granja que tenemos con mi esposo a diez quilómetros de la ciudad de Colonia Valdense. Cuando veía alejarse el vehículo con las tías y los chicos, me puse a pensar...

¡Qué paz irradian los rostros de estos chicos y chicas que viven en el Hogar El Sarandi!

Esa paz que cuida sus corazones, no viene ciertamente de una elaboración intelectual que no pueden hacer, sino de una vivencia de fe compartida y experimentada en su vida diaria: en las relaciones de unos con otros, no siempre fáciles, en el espíritu de agradecimiento ante la comida, el descanso, la visita... y tantas otras cosas, en la oración compartida a veces con muy pocas palabras pero con todo el corazón.

Esa misma paz que cuida los corazones de los internos de un hogar, también cuida nuestros corazones cuando nuestro grupo de mujeres se reúne una vez por mes. Allí, católicas, apostólicas, bautista, valdenses, y algunas que no pertenecen a ninguna iglesia, nos juntamos en torno al material del círculo de oración. Depositamos nuestras moneditas, leemos, comentamos el texto, y nos llevamos el tema de oración para nuestras casas, hasta que volvamos a reunirnos al mes siguiente. Nuestras diferencias quedan en segundo plano, frente a todo lo que nos une en nuestros problemas cotidianos, nuestros gustos, nuestro transitar por la sociedad en la que vivimos. También compartimos nuestras historias de vida, que por cierto son muy diferentes, y eso nos enriquece.

Hablé de mi hijo mayor. Los otros dos, hace ocho años que no nos acompañan. Fallecieron en el mismo mes, por causas distintas. En esos días aciagos, en la soledad de la noche, en la oscuridad, yo creía que no habría un nuevo despertar. Y me aferraba a la oración, pidiendo a Dios la posibilidad de ver un nuevo día... y me dormía en paz. Y a la mañana siguiente el sol volvía a salir. Y allí estaban las personas que me rodeaban, con su afecto y su disposición a ayudar. Y la vida seguía. Con sus

exigencias, sus urgencias, y también sus felicidades. Porque no todo es tristeza y dolor en este mundo que Dios nos regala.

En la carta a los Filipenses, Pablo vuelca su experiencia de vida. Una vida rica, con luces y sombras, con momentos brillantes y otros muy dolorosos. Y con claridad nos dice que hay cosas que el ser humano no puede entender. Como esa paz que no podemos conseguir a costa de nuestros esfuerzos, sino que es un don que recibimos de nuestro Dios en Cristo Jesús. Y por eso debemos ser agradecidos /as.

ORACIÓN: Oh Dios, que en nuestro caminar diario, podamos presentarte todo lo nuestro, hasta lo más íntimo y escondido, y podamos ser agradecidas como nos enseñó Jesús. Danos tu paz. AMÉN

Translation into English

THE PEACE WHICH GOD GIVES US

By Nora Geymonat Armand Hugón, Uruguay

Philippians 4: 6-7

This morning Gerardo and his companions came to see us. Gerardo is my eldest son who lives in a home for mentally dis-abled persons, because he suffers from epilepsy and a very low IQ. With their ample smiles the young men and women enjoyed looking at the animals we breed on a farm at a distance of 10 kms from the town of Colonia Valdense in Uruguay. When their minibus drove away, taking these “children” accompanied by the caretakers, I started thinking...

How much peace irradiates from the faces of these young people who live together at a special home! This peace that is rooted in their hearts, is by no means the result of an intellectual elaboration of which they are incapable; it is the result of living together and sharing their faith in their daily lives, in their relationships which are not always smooth and easy, in the spirit of gratitude expressed before meals, in rest hours and during visits ... and many other things, in a few words of prayer which are heartfelt.

It is the same peace which is also present in the hearts of our women’s group which meets once a month. As members of the catholic, apostolic, baptist, and waldensian churches, and some who are no church members, we gather around the meditations

of the "Circle of Prayer". We deposit our least coins, read and comment upon the texts, and we remember the words of the prayers as we return home. Our differences stay in the background as we think of all the elements that unite us in our problems and pleasures, on our journey in today's society. We also share life-stories which are very different, and feel enriched.

I mentioned my eldest son. The other two are no longer with us. They died 8 years ago, in the same month, for different reasons. During those grueling days, in the darkness and solitude of the night, I thought there could be no new awakening. I clung to prayer, begging God for the possibility of seeing a new dawn ... and I was able to sleep in peace. On the next morning the sun rose again. I was surrounded by persons who offered me their affection and readiness to help. Life continued, with its demands and urgent claims, but also with its joys. Not everything is pain and sadness in our God-given world.

In the letter to the Philippians Paul pours out his life experience. It is a life rich in light and shadow, with brilliant moments as well as very painful trials. And he tells us very clearly that there are things human beings are unable to understand. Like this peace which we are unable to acquire by means of our own efforts, because it is a gift we receive from our God in Christ Jesus. And that is why we should be grateful.

Prayer: Oh God, may we be able to present all our thoughts and feelings, down to the most intimate and hidden ones, to you, and may we be grateful as Jesus taught us. Give us your peace. AMEN.

Nora Geymonat Armand Hugón was born and raised in a Waldensian family in Uruguay's countryside. She and her husband raise poultry and small cattle on a modest farm off the main roads. She has been a Sunday-school teacher in her small rural community since her confirmation as a member of the church.

The background of "Waldensians" in Latin America: You may have heard about the Waldensian movement in the 12th century in the South of France - a movement persecuted as heretics - some of whom survived in the Alps in the North of Italy. When they obtained their Civil rights in the middle of the 19th Century (!!) some of these Italian Protestants emigrated to South America where they have formed a church that is now called the "Evangelical Waldensian Church of the River Plate" because it is located in Argentina and Uruguay. It is a church that belongs to the Family of Reformed Churches, a Founder Church of the WCC, and in Italy the strongest Protestant presence in a very "Catholic" country. The South American Branch celebrated its 150th anniversary last year

Our author, Nora Geymonat, is a descendant of those 19th century Immigrants who created rural communities in the southern part of Uruguay. One of their main concerns was to create schools so that their numerous children would be able to function as responsible citizens and church members. But the "little schools" they founded were open to all neighbourhood children and lessons were taught in Spanish, although one hour per day was reserved for the traditional French. On Sundays the facility would become a Sunday School. The generation of Nora's parents grew up in those surroundings. Currently all those educational facilities have been turned over to the State. But some of the Sunday schools remain (not all of them, families are much smaller nowadays!) One of Nora's sisters is a schoolteacher and she is the one who helped Nora write. The "home" where Gerardo and his friends live, is a home for mentally and physically disabled persons that was founded by the Waldensian church, where severely disabled persons are cared for in a community.

By **Elisabeth Delmonte**

LIFE EXPERIENCE OF GOD'S ASSURANCE AND PROMISE

By Shanthi Mathai, India

Jeremiah. 29: 11-13

God's message through prophet Jeremiah to the people of Israel who were in exile in Babylon, provides all of God's people of all ages with strong assurance, promise, vision and mission. This promise comes to them at a time of utter hopelessness, helplessness and confusing circumstances. Many times when things go out of our control or expectations or contrary to our visions and hope or when there isn't a ray of hope, we may get discouraged about our lives, and its purpose and plans. But God says, "I alone know the plans I have for you" and it doesn't stop there, "plans for welfare and not for harm to give you a future with hope". (Vs.11)

A future with hope is a dream of all people. God, who can turn and convert every hopeless situation into a situation of hope, promises "a future with hope". The everlasting assurance of the liberating and sustaining love of God is the promise.

But for a vast majority of people, women and children in India and other third world countries, a future with hope is an unthinkable, unfulfilled dream. Poverty, casteism (discrimination of people in the name of community in which one is born), scarcity of drinking water, lack of adequate livelihood facilities, illiteracy, displacement from their land because of dams and other development activities, atrocities, terrorism etc. along with social discrimination towards women which include sex determination before birth and feticide, dowry system, trafficking, sexual exploitation, physical and psychological violence and abuse in families and societies and unequal treatment even in Church make the situation very complex. In recent years, the increasing intolerance between different religious communities in India leads to state of forceful displacement and damage to properties, livelihood and even life. This paves the way for destruction of social and religious

harmony and cultural acceptance which results in social unrest and breakage of communities.

We feel like asking the life questions, "Why am I in this situation?", "Why there is always trouble and hardships for me?", and even "Why am I born as a woman?" The promise, "God has a plan and purpose for each individual of her/his life". It seems to be very strange and unbelievable in the midst of such life realities, trials and tribulations.

The God of the Bible who came down to Hagar in the wilderness, who gave wisdom to the young girl Miriam to act at a crucial situation to save the life of her brother and who broke Sabbath to help the crippled woman to stand straight, and the God of history who strengthened the people to overcome the different historic situations of ethnic cleansing, wars and natural calamities and who used ordinary women and men for building communities and for restoring peace gives the promise of liberating and sustaining plans for our future.

"Is it the plan of God that people perish?", "Will there be a future for my girl children, my generation?" "Isn't God hearing us?" These are the cries of many Indian women. The hope of liberation and sustenance is given through the promise, "If you call upon me, I will hear you", "When you search for me with all your heart, you will find me", "If you seek for me, I will let you find me" "and bring you back from to your place from exile" (Vs. 12,13, 14b)

This is a call for participation in the redemptive act of God. How is this possible? How can we join our hearts in this searching and seeking? How can we reach out in God's love to our neighbours and communities?

Searching and seeking for God should include

1. Interlinking and networking of people – persons, families and communities- through the act of prayer
2. Empowerment of families and communities through the sharing of experiences and agonies

3. Envisaging a vision for a new community, new humanity and hope for a new heaven and earth beyond all discriminations and disparities through encountering day-to-day realities

God calls us to be part of such a searching and seeking experience. This assurance of God gives women the confidence that the God who works in history is someone who is approachable at all times, someone whose presence is always with us, someone who strengthens us with the vision of a future with hope. This assurance is the driving force to overcome all forms of violence and injustice.

The following words which I learned in my schooldays have been a source of strength to me and hope that this will help all of us in all situations:

The light of God surrounds you,
The love of God enfolds you,
The power of God protects you,
The presence of God watches over you,
Wherever you are, God is!

Prayer: - Dear Parent God, your promise and assurance are our hope and strength. May our lives be worthy of sharing this hope and vision to others.

Shanthi Mathai of the Mar Thoma Church in India is member of the General Committee of Asian Church Women's Conference (ACWC). She is a theologically trained woman and a priest's wife who is actively involved in the ecumenical movement.

PRAYERS FOR WOMEN IN CONFLICT SITUATION IN AFRICA

By Ann Kioi and Rose Musila, Kenya

Philippians 4:6

"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God".

We join our hearts in prayer for women in the African continent, bringing our requests to be known unto God as expressed in Philippians 4:6.

In Kenya we have just recovered from the Post election Violence. Women went through difficult moments and local women's experiences of the post election violence are heart breaking. According to the study carried out by YWCA Emergency Response Team to the Kenyan crisis,

"The women interviewed were emotionally traumatized as a result of the experiences they lived through. Most of them witnessed as their houses and small businesses were burnt and looted. They lost their only source of livelihoods and personal belongings, which, as grassroots women, had taken them a long time and a lot of effort to acquire through daily struggle. None of the women interviewed said they had been physically or sexually violated. But, some of them were threatened with rape and death as one woman stated, "My neighbor was about to be raped but she paid a lot of money. When I heard that I escaped and sought refuge at the police station". Another one said, "My auntie was slashed with a machete and she died on the spot. They tried to rape me but I ran away". Other women shared that they heard girls have been raped in the surrounding area. One woman in Likoni observed that, "women were abandoned by their men who ran away".

These are some of the women's voices that we hear and read about in conflict situations.

Our Prayer:

We pray for peace with a greater justness in every country in our continent. God of justness and mercy, we pray for an end to conflicts in the African continent. We urge all the African leaders to join us in prayers for the women who have suffered

tremendously from the many conflicts that our continent has experienced. We dedicate our prayers to women in Sudan, Darfur Region, in the Great Lakes Regions especially women in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Women in Zimbabwe, Somalia and to all women in the world who are experiencing conflicts.

We pray for the quick cessation of violence around the continent especially in Sudan, Darfur Region, Somalia, and Zimbabwe where much of the violence perpetrated has resulted in grave human rights violations against vulnerable women and their children.

We also pray for the women in the conflict zone of Eastern D. R. Congo who are helplessly subjected to extreme forms of violence carried out by rebel soldiers. We lift up the deplorable humanitarian situation in D.R. Congo today due to the ongoing conflict. We call upon churches around the continent to join together in prayer for all the needy families living in conflict zones in the continent and for organizations struggling to enter the conflict zones in order to distribute humanitarian aid.

We pray for wisdom among our leaders that will bring greater peace in our continent. We pray for understanding and compassion that will safeguard the innocent and feed and find home for all refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in the continent and all who suffer. We pray for companionship and strength for all those women who mourn the loss of their loved ones. We pray that God will protect all who remain at risk.

We pray that as Christians, as we join our hearts in prayer, we will be awakened to the needs in our communities. May our prayers and contributions make a difference in people's lives in the African continent and the world at large. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Ann Kioi - is a Kenyan, Programmes Admin Assistant at the All Africa Conference of Churches with a degree in International Relations and a diploma in Information Technology. She works in the Programmes department and assists with the women's work.

Rose Musila: - is a member of ICFLC and the Finance Manager of the All Africa Conference of Churches. She is married to Paul and is a mother of two children, Joy and Ivan.

Source: YWCA Emergency Response to Kenya Crisis analysis of Rapid Assessment for women, girls and children in Mishomoroni and Lioni, Mombasa District"

A FUTURE FASHIONED BY PRAYER AND HOPE

by Isolene M. Rolle, The Bahamas

Jeremiah 29:11-13 *"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray for me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart."*

Hope is genuine faith in God. It is different from the hope that people generally speak about. It is not a mere wish for something, but a strong confidence that is placed in God. Hope is the assured belief that God will do what He has promised. Without God, we really have no faith, and therefore we have no hope. According to the Christian meaning of hope, it cannot be separated from faith. We cannot see the things for which we hope, and we have no need to hope for what we already have.

Our hopes are achieved through prayer. Praying with hope strengthens our belief in Christ. When we pray, we tell God about the things that are most important to us at the time. It is our desires, hopes and aspirations that determine our future. When we come to the realization that we have no control over what happens in our future, we hope and pray. But we pray to a God who gives us hope and assists us when we find ourselves in bondage to the vexing situations of life.

The hope and the prayer that we have are the basic ingredients that fashion our future. So when we find ourselves in desperate situations, and we feel like giving up, let us remember we have a future and we are never without a prayer.

In the text, God did not forget His people even though they were captives in Babylon. He planned to give them a new beginning with new purpose to turn them into new people. According to God's plan we can hope for a good future.

The Fellowship of the Least Coin gives hope to women and children all over the world. God is with us and He has His hand

on us; He sees and understands. Let us reflect for just a moment; on the many thousands who are helped spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and financially.

The future is in Jesus Christ the Solid Rock! So we need not be anxious about anything. We do not seem to understand the things about the future, but we know that our God holds the future, even as He holds our hands. Let us fashion our future with hope and prayer so that our tomorrows will be better than our yesterdays.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Word and the plan that You have for our lives.

Thank You for the privilege to join hearts in prayer with other Christian women around the world. Through the Holy Spirit Your promises stand sure; we are grateful for hope, faith and prayer. We will trust you always, live clean lives before You, that others will see You through us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Isolene M. Rolle is an Ordained Minister and Marriage Officer of the Baptist faith, A strong believer in the power of prayer, she is also an active member of World Day of Prayer, and Fellowship of the Least Coin Committees. She resides in The Bahamas.

THE TALE OF TWO BUILDINGS

By Calipay Lubang, Philippines

Today I woke up feeling so disturbed and perplexed because of a dream. Two buildings stood facing each other on a narrow, busy street. One was very tall while the other was smaller in height but with a wider base. In this dream I saw the tall building collapse slowly until it crumbled into pieces on the ground while the other building remained standing. There were significant people in that dream, one of whom remarked as the tall building was collapsing that his things are gone for he lived there. His statement jolted me for I realized that my things were gone, too, as that tall building was also my abode. Scenes flashed one after another as my friend and I were wandering aimlessly, people processing downward in a building, water draining in the river – all at random so that when I woke up I felt I just got back from a long, exhausting trip.

I uttered a prayer saying, “O God, what are you telling me in this strange dream?” I was certain that God is showing me an important message as had been in the past. God communicated to me in dreams especially during moments of transitions in my life when major decisions have to be made. The dreams were vivid but without any coherence at all. However, they enlivened my prayer life having something to bring to God and discern God's will which always work for our welfare as prophet Jeremiah wrote,

“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray for me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:11-13 NRSV)

Said at a time when Judah was collapsing as a nation but trying to save herself and preserve her “dignity” in the spirit of nationalism, Jeremiah called on the people to let go and let God's plans prevail for truly these plans shall work for everyone's good. The prophet was even charged with treason for his message called the people to submit to their captors and not resist. Haughtiness must give way to humility and being taken captive, thrown in exile, this will bring them back to intimacy with God.

Perhaps the constant bombarding of news lately about the current global financial crises and my close monitoring of these events have unknowingly left anxieties in me for the congregation

in which I am pastoring, members of whom mostly live in the fringes of society being economically disadvantaged. This year I sometimes find myself sending off an average of two church members in a quarter going overseas to work. More women leave than men implying loss of primary nurturers and caregivers of children at home leading to more family break-ups. The moral fabric of society is collapsing in the name of “modernization, economic prosperity and globalization,” which in reality offers nothing.

My dream is truly breaking forth a strong message. It could be challenging me to discern the next direction where God is taking me in my ministerial journey as a pastor. But it could also be unraveling a truth about the global spiritual condition of humankind that has built up a tower of pride which is now crumbling before our eyes. The effects of globalization with rich countries seizing control and lording over the poorer ones are now taking its toll. The rich are being humbled and the poor are being exalted. Human pride will surely crumble but the Word of God will remain strong and unchanged.

I see my dream as a warning on the result of taking control of our lives and ignoring God. Let us instead bow down before God whose plans will give us a future of hope. In God alone will we find rest and true peace. If we seek God with all our heart, God will draw near to us.

Prayer: O God, we acknowledge that your thoughts are not our thoughts, your ways are not our ways, yet we are deeply grateful that you continue to reveal your plans for us through various means calling us to draw near to you. Thank you that we can rest on the assurance that your plans for us will bring life and peace. Thus, help us to stand firm on the promises of your Word. Amen.

Calipay “Leng” P. Lubang is an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines and is currently serving as administrative pastor of Sabang Disciples of Christ Church.

THE TONGUE BLESSING OR CURSE

By Reem Fouad El Far, Jordan

Matthew 12:34-37 (NRSV) *“...For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure. I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”*

A loquacious human may say about 3000 words/day!! But how do our words affect others???

Our tongue is only a small voluntary muscle which is supposed to be under our conscious control. But unfortunately it may act differently. It is very easy to say lots of things without ANY benefit, but if we are believers and good Christians and our hearts are full of love and faith then our words and sayings should be a blessing nourishing those who listen. As mentioned in Prov. 16:23 **“A wise man’s(woman’s) heart guides his(her) mouth and his(her) lips promote instruction“**

If people get infected with gossip disease, it will spread quickly and destroy good relations, understanding or cooperation among people who work together with passion as the bible said **“A perverse man(woman) stirs up dissension and a gossip separates close friends”** Prov.16:28. The most important is to stop this disease from spreading in churches, otherwise it will demolish and damage the church’s spirit. The clergy will be dealing with it rather than the spiritual life of the congregation delegated to them.

Comparing gossip with waste; we can see people who are waste collectors or hunters ready to collect any word or rumor and feel happy they knew about it, and start spreading it out. Fortunately there are people who are waste disposers, they get rid of the waste by dragging and dumping it in the **“FORGET ABOUT”** “disposal site of their mind.” They pray for rumor’s subject as well as carriers, to receive God’s forgiveness and help to stop this awful habit, guidance to think before repeating gossips, guardedness on lips to change from destruction into construction, instructional lips that speak in accordance to God’s willing **“Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord: keep watch over the door of my lips”** Psalm:141:3

Psalm 139:4 ***“Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely.”*** The verse tells us that God is listening to what we say, so we have to pay attention and watch our words. Avoid using bad words, gossip, or give bad comments, instead we only have to say words that please God, and our prayers should be as David said in Psalm 19:14 ***“May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight”*** .

We also have to understand whom we are talking to, as well as what we want to say, resulting in successful communication. Honesty and truthfulness in our witness is much respected and treasured by God and people ***“Truthful lips endure forever but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.”*** and ***“The Lord detests lying lips, but delights in those who are truthful”*** Prov.12:19 +22 . Patience and calmness when facing problems and watching what we say is also blessed by God. Prov.15:1+4 ***“A gentle answer turns away wrath , but a harsh word stirs up anger.”*** and ***“ The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit. “***

From all the above we can see that our lips could be blessing or a curse depending on what comes out of them, so watch your tongue .

Prayer: Our God, we thank you for giving us the wisdom to understand your desires by reading your word. Help us, O God, to apply it in our lives by controlling and monitoring our sayings to be truthful and honest to bring healing to those who surround us. Help us to have clean hearts from which all loving words come. Help us to act as waste disposals where gossip is. Surround us with your caring protection and love.

We ask this in the name of your beloved son Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Savior. AMEN

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OIKOCREDIT

Ecumenical Development Cooperative Society

Over ten years ago, the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin invested in Oikocredit. This is an international Development Bank established in 1975 in Rotterdam and run by Christians on a cooperative basis. It receives capital from all over the world and uses it to provide loans to the economically disadvantaged at a reasonable interest rate. This allows them to establish cooperative self-development enterprises (cottage industries as they are sometimes called). Oikocredit provides guarantees for loans from other financial institutions and as loans are repaid, the capital can then be invested in other projects. They have a wonderful record of repayment.

Membership is open to Churches of the World Council of Churches as well as others that are not members of the WCC and other Church related organizations and individuals concerned about development and promoting economic growth together with social justice and self-reliance in the poor areas of the world, in a manner consistent with the moral and social principles of the World Council of Churches.

Return on investment is small in monetary terms – 2% for the 15th consecutive year, but members consider the empowerment of economically disadvantaged people a worthwhile investment and accept the small financial return (often reinvested back into Oikocredit) while seeking the highest possible social return.

There is an international Board of Directors who must approve each loan and the criteria for lending money is strict. The money loaned must benefit the communities that are directly involved in planning and operating the enterprises. Oikocredit emphasizes women’s participation at every level, activities that respect God’s creation, and the well-being of children.

An Annual meeting is held every year and reports given to

members. The latest report from the meeting held in India gives exciting news about Cote d'Ivoire - Cocovico Market in West SAfrica – in spite of political instability and civil war, in April 2008 a cooperative of more than 200 food-crop vendors--all women -- was opened. Besides appropriate spaces for market stalls, the market provides amongst others a health care centre, a day care and public toilets.

Also news about Annesagar, India where a loan from Oikocredit helped women organize into cooperatives to market their products. One example involves dairy farmers mostly women who buy a buffalo for dairy production and sell their milk through the cooperative as well as have some for their own use. They report that one was able to buy land for agriculture and another reported as a result of the extra income generated she was able to send her children to school – there are many other stories of mission in action and we are a part of that. Further information is available on their website www.oikocredit.org.

Joanne Instance

Past Honorary Treasurer, ICFLC
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