

Press release- Priscilla Burns, EDS

September 26 and 27, EDS will play host for the first New England Beijing Circles Conference, sponsored by the Episcopal Church of the United States.

In 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women, sponsored by the United Nations and held in Beijing, China, listed twelve critical areas of concern regarding the status of women. To address those areas of concern — ranging from the increasing burden of poverty on women to violence against women to stereotyping and gender inequalities to discrimination against the girl child, the Conference adopted the Beijing Platform for Action.

In 2004, seeing the need for the issues of Beijing to be addressed by the church and the entire Anglican Communion, a small group of women in the metro NY area formed AWE, Anglican Womens Empowerment, with leadership from Phoebe Griswold and Tai Matalavea. They began to gather their Anglican and US sisters at the annual Commission on the Status of Women at the UN with the purpose of educating themselves and others about the Beijing Platform for Action and to learn how the church might have an effect on outcomes related to the CSW.

While the participation of the delegation of women at the UNCSW has been revolutionary, hundreds of women throughout the US who are interested in these issues are not able to participate. The idea to create Beijing Circles came out of the experience at the UN as a way to extend the reach of the education and advocacy being done in New York to the rest of the church. Beijing Circles are now being formed across the country as a tool to work together in small groups to address issues of poverty, education, health and gender equality both from a local and a global perspective. The Circle provides a unique opportunity to individually and collectively raise awareness of the possibility of change for all women. It seeks to empower women to pursue the implementation of positive outcomes by offering a variety of plans for action and advocacy.

5 essential elements

- circle- the principles which allow all voices to be heard and the space for the Holy Spirit to speak
- local & global—unlike MDG which are global
- gender specific—focus on women as the key to accomplishments in all areas
- based in UN—Platform for Action forged at a UN womens conference in Beijing in 1995—5 years before the Millenium Declaration
- reflection/action model—reflection which leads to action which leads to more reflection and around we go—educate ourselves and process what we learn