



**The Episcopal Church Center**  
**815 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in the Episcopal Church,

So often when we in the American Church ask what we can do to help alleviate poverty, armed conflict, or the AIDS crisis in other parts of the world, our sisters in more distant provinces of the Anglican Communion reply, “Do your own work.” First, do the work where you are. As one sister from Tanzania, faced with the overwhelming task as a young girl of cleaning her whole house reminds us, “Start Sweeping at your Feet.” This Beijing Circles Resource Book is a start at doing just that. Organizing for change in our congregations, communities, our country and our world is the spring board for connecting with sisters from around the world to make a global difference.

This resource takes the issues of the Beijing Platform for Action, signed by 189 UN member nations in 1995 and invites you to choose one, one which ignites your passion, your faith and your zeal to follow in the steps of Jesus. The resource invites you to join with sisters (and brothers!) in your community to pray, reflect, act and to be in touch with other circles which are doing the same.

The hope-filled work of Beijing Circles claims that grounded in our faith in Jesus Christ, we can do more than we could ask or imagine. And, as we say, it is a resource, a beginning. The real work, the initiative, the results will come as circles are created, as you educate yourselves and claim your own power in the work of the Gospel.

In 2006 we wrote that this resource is a work in progress. So it is. This is now our second edition. It contains a few minor corrections and some additional resources. Circles have been created now from Rhode Island to Minnesota, from California to Southwest Florida. We’ve held our first regional conference and we’re planning a Beijing Circle Summit in New York in February of 2008. We’re sweeping at our feet.

Please check our web site on an ongoing basis for stories from our circles. And please be in touch with us with your feedback at [womensministries@episcopalchurch.org](mailto:womensministries@episcopalchurch.org).

May God’s blessing be upon us all in our work.

Faithfully,

The Rev. Margaret Rose  
Office of Women’s Ministries

The Rev. Susanne Watson Epting  
Editor

**REVISED EDITION  
NOVEMBER 2007**

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## **What's in a Name?**

### **The Evolution of Beijing Circles**

Some of us are old enough to remember when the word “circle” was used by our grandmothers to describe somewhere they were going – to be with other women. It was often a weekly routine, a part of life. Sometimes it was a sewing circle. Sometimes it was to study the bible. Sometimes we just heard, “I’m going to Circle,” and we weren’t entirely sure what it was about. But it was always made up of women and, in my frame of reference, it was something that my own grandmother took very seriously.

She played the Autoharp each week when the ladies gathered. (That’s what she called them.) Until recently I had that old Autoharp, but years of use and climate changes caused it to warp and spring, finally until it was beyond repair. I never met the women in Grandma’s Circle, but I did listen to my grandma practice the old Baptist hymns in preparation for that weekly gathering.

More than forty years later, I wonder at the many meanings around the idea of the circle. As a little girl it was simply a part of Grandma’s church life. As a woman now moving past middle age, the circle has a meaning sometimes fraught with tones of “political,” or “alternative,” or “process,” sometimes dismissed, other times laden with possibility.

In these days, we think of a circle as a method of being inclusive. People whose interests are not represented -- or are represented by others not so deeply affected -- people who are overrun by parliamentary procedures, corporate board rooms, hierarchies of offices and officers, have reclaimed the circle as a shape and space that invites shared leadership, mutual accountability, and full participation by its members.

Today’s world is a multi-world; multi-cultural, multi-generational, multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-racial -- a glorious but sometimes overwhelming spectrum of content, context and interpretation. In our part of the world alone, five separate generations co-exist, each with their own defining moments, historical joys and sorrows, along with different ways of interpreting the world.

Even something as simple as a circle has slightly different interpretations from generation to generation, and yet, some of us believe there is something inherently comfortable and natural about the circle in the lives of women throughout time. In fact, some of us believe there is something so transformational about the circle that we owe it to ourselves to offer it to others, in order to contribute to the healing of the world.

The term “Beijing Circle” will never end up on a billboard, nor will it likely become a catch phrase among scores of Christian women. But for those who take the time to investigate its meaning, we suspect holy and universal truth will be glimpsed and brought to action.

In another section of this resource booklet, attention will be given to how to form a circle. Creating an environment that enables shared leadership, mutual accountability and full participation takes practice. Just because we wish to suggest processes and forms of leadership that are not defined by power and patriarchy does not mean that we are immune to habits or learned behaviors that support them. No matter how much we yearn for change, and perhaps especially if we do, tender self-examination is always in order. How have we contributed (knowingly or unknowingly) to the state of the world

we wish to change? And what do we need to learn and to practice in order to offer alternatives to those around us?

The name “Beijing Circle,” itself, is testimony to the complexity of the global world in which we live. What does a circle, with Christ at the center, surrounded by faithful women committed to their faith and to each other, have to do with Beijing? Not unlike the word “circle,” the word “Beijing,” might well mean different things to various generations of women. The history of China in the 20<sup>th</sup> century alone is complex. Wars, rebellions, changes in political systems, invasion by European and Japanese powers, imperial governments, the separation of Taiwan and China, the events are complex and perhaps not well known to many of us.

Were we to ask women of different generations what the word “Beijing” means to them, we might well hear responses anywhere from “Didn’t they used to call Beijing, Peking?” to thoughts about Mao Tse Tung, to President Nixon’s work to open relations between the U.S. and China, to Buddhism, to the Forbidden City and Tian’anmen Square – and maybe even to remembering the childhood dream of digging a tunnel to China,.

However, for the purposes of this resource, “Beijing” means something very specific. In 1995, Beijing was the site for the Fourth World Conference on Women sponsored by the United Nations. It was there that the Beijing Platform for Action was produced. Ten years later, in reviewing the progress made on the areas of concern identified in that Platform, a small group of women from the Episcopal Church were so deeply moved by their experiences at the 2005 gathering of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW - Beijing +10), that they dedicated themselves to inviting others in their part of the world to share in their discoveries. To share their yearning for justice, their hope for a global consciousness and their attention to the realities of women in their own country and in the countries part of their Episcopal Province of the Anglican Communion.<sup>1</sup>

The group called itself “Episcopal Women Changing the World,” and adopted a mission statement that reads:

As women in the Episcopal Church [in the United States], in solidarity and mission with our sisters throughout the Anglican Communion, we seek to further our Gospel conviction for justice and peace through our presence at the United Nations. We believe that the United Nations is an important instrument for implementing those convictions. We also commit to implementing the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action both in our church and our country/ies, as well as alongside our sisters in the rest of the Communion.

That group remains a work in progress. More committed to the fluidity of a movement, rather than creating an institutional structure, these Christian women feel called to claim the fullness of what it means to be the body of Christ: connected, one part

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<sup>1</sup> While our Constitution states, “The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, otherwise known as The Episcopal Church . . .” it consists not only of the United States, but includes: Haiti, The Virgin Islands, the American Convocation of Churches in Europe [Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and Switzerland], but also Colombia, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Littoral, Micronesia and Taiwan. Venezuela and Puerto Rico are extra-provincial.

to another; organic, adaptable; clear that while each part of the body has its own role and identity, each part needs the other in order to form a glorious whole.

Every member of the original group, each in her own ways, continues to answer the Spirit's urgent beckoning to consider the implications of radical equality in Christ. We might note that in the few years since the first version of this resource booklet was written, the group has changed significantly. The Episcopal Church delegation to the UNCSW has expanded and contracted, but the movement itself has grown with the creation of more and more Beijing Circles around the church. In the company of faithful women who have followed an even more faithful God throughout the ages, even more women invite you to join them. Bringing together the best of their faith, a circle, and the issues raised in the Beijing Platform for action, it is their hope that God's healing touch will be extended, circle-by-circle.

Creating a Beijing Circle is one little step toward change, one step toward hope, and one way to commit again to bringing our love of God to action.

While the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women meeting first served as the focal point of our opportunity to gather, that's only part of the picture. We know that our common concerns about gender equity and our positive interaction with sisters from all over the Anglican Communion and the world have made a difference in our own Communion. While it is currently a Communion in which some voices threaten division – some of us know at very fundamental levels how deeply we're connected, and are determined to remain connected. We know that there are specific actions to be taken, statements to be made, goals to be set, directly in relation to the work of the UNCSW. We also know that based on this work and our common love in Christ that we have found the courage to offer resolutions and statements to the church that we hope will witness to our solidarity with each other in Christ.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to demonstrating this solidarity, another reason to have an Episcopal Church delegation has been that we know how desperately U.S. relations with the UN need to be strengthened. We know that the UN gives us a universal language, and is a place, perhaps the only place, where we can count on women's concerns being brought before a worldwide audience. In order to help at all around the world, we must do our own work in this country.

We know that this process is only a part of something much bigger. The first small group of women, determined to keep this work alive, tried to capture that by calling ourselves "Episcopal Women Changing the World." We wanted to create awareness in our local churches about these important issues, not only as they relate to the UN and making a difference globally, but also to remind our communities and ourselves that all of the issues of the Platform are issues right here where we live!

We wanted to make sure that we grounded our actions in our faith and that we took time to reflect on them. Of course we know that action is important. We know in a very general way that our faith compels us to speak and to act. But we don't always ground those actions in the stories and traditions of our faith, and with those who have faithfully gone before us. We don't always take time to affirm each other in those actions and pray together.

That brings us back to the circle. And a work in progress. We hope that you'll be willing to join us.

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<sup>2</sup> See the "Additional Resources" section of this booklet for statements and resolutions.

## CIRCLE GUIDELINES<sup>3</sup>

One of the women best known for her work with circles, and her commitment to circles as a means of transforming the world is Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D. The circle guidelines that we suggest are from the “Millionth Circle” web site and are also found in Dr. Bolen’s book The Millionth Circle. If you have an opportunity to pick up this 87-page book, we think you’ll find it very helpful. Her book also includes a list of principles, as well as stories about what works, what to do if a circle isn’t working, and how to connect with other circles.

Here are the guidelines to keep in mind.

- **Create your circle.**
- **Consider it sacred space.**
- **One person speaks at a time.**
- **Speak and listen from the heart.**
- **Encourage and welcome diverse points of view.**
- **Listen with discernment rather than judgment.**
- **Share leadership and resources.**
- **Decide together how decisions will be made.**
- **Work toward consensus when possible.**
- **Offer experience instead of advice.**
- **When in doubt or need, pause and silently ask for guidance.**
- **Decide together what is to be held in confidence.**
- **Speak from your own experience and beliefs rather than speaking for others.**
- **Open and close the circle by hearing each voice.**

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<sup>3</sup> From the “Millionth Circle” web site: [www.millionthcircle.org](http://www.millionthcircle.org)

## Some simple steps in creating a Beijing Circle

- Gather a group of four to eight women.
- Watch the DVD “Shall We Gather.” The DVD was sent to all congregations in February 2006 as a part of the theme for World Mission Sunday. There should be a copy of it in your church office or library. Ask around. You can also contact the Office of Women’s Ministries:

815 Second Avenue  
New York, NY 10017  
800 334-7626 x 5346  
e-mail: [womensministries@episcopalchurch.org](mailto:womensministries@episcopalchurch.org)

- You may also want to watch the DVD “From East Timor to Yonkers.” It includes a discussion on how and why a Beijing Circle might be helpful in congregations. It is available through Episcopal Books and Resources at the Church Center (above address).
- Read the Beijing Platform for Action together. The entire document is lengthy, but can be taken in small bits. The Critical Areas of Concern are listed on the next page. You can find the document online at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/> or you can purchase it online from the UN by going to <https://unp.un.org/details.aspx?entry=EP1766&title=Platform+for+Action+and+the+Beijing+Declaration%3a+Fourth+World+Conference+on+Women%2c+Beijing%2c+China>.
- Make sure to review the Circle Guidelines and see if you’d like to add or subtract anything. It will be important to decide how the rotation of facilitators will be established (or co-facilitators). Make sure to set aside at least an hour and a half for your session.
- Share stories, experiences and things you may have read that relate to the issues of the platform. Sometimes facilitators bring articles or background information in addition to what’s included in the resource booklet. Sometimes groups gather resources in a file to revisit at another time.
- Share a meditation from the resource book and begin to focus in on which issues for further study and reflection. Be sure that you allow enough time for a brief check-in before you start. Begin with a prayer and arrange your time so you cover all parts of the booklet section. Some circles have told us that they’ve needed to adjust their meeting times to ensure that they are able to do all the reflection, especially the spiritual reflection.



- Don't feel that you need to take action immediately. Taking part in the circle *is* an action. Many groups take a while to discern the actions that are right for them. In the meantime, they affirm and bless all the individual efforts that may be going on and look for ways to strengthen them. We've learned that many groups use this as an educational tool and realize that education and discernment take time. The resource booklet is non-prescriptive for just this reason. Every group and every community is different. What works in one place may not work as well in another. And each local community has its own challenges and opportunities for action.

There is a brief list of resources at the back of the booklet. It is far from exhaustive. It will give you an introduction and a taste of the Critical Areas. It will be important to realize that gathering the information you need, in addition to the introduction provided here, will require time. Take all the time you need with these important areas and actions. Learning about the problems, data, possible solutions, and the connections to our faith will serve you well.

In this time of real commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's), this resource and the Beijing Platform for Action are important tools to use in realizing Goal #3 – "Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women." You can use this same process with all of the MDG's, or with other important studies and reports.

Please feel free to send us your suggestions and feedback. The staff at the Office of Women's Ministry:

Margaret Rose:	<a href="mailto:mrose@episcopalchurch.org">mrose@episcopalchurch.org</a>
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## Ways to talk about the Circle

Kim Robey has suggested a few ways to talk about the circle itself. You might want to review these periodically:

- How do you keep a movement going?
- What is a circle?
- “The invisible power of women’s circles acts on two levels. A circle of women may appear to be just women talking. But if it is a circle, especially one with a spiritual center, it will have an invisible effect on the women in it. Second is the possibility that each circle is contributing to a critical mass that will bring an end to patriarchy. This is the effect on culture of the millionth circle.” ([Urgent Message From Mother](#)- Jean Shinoda Bolen - p. 130)
- “Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach. Any small calm thing that one soul can do to help another, to assist some portion of this suffering world, will help immensely. It is not given to us to know which acts or by whom, will cause the critical mass to tip toward an enduring good. What is needed for dramatic change is an accumulation of acts.” --Clarissa Pinkola Estes
- “Perhaps there is only one person’s voice lacking for peace to come to the world.”--Kurt Kauter
- “Who we become depends on the choices we make. We are in *liminal* time- when each person doing her part in response to something stirring in the morphic field can determine what comes next.” --Bolen
- The Beijing Platform includes everyone.
- We can connect with a global family of women through its issues.
- You can do this in your parish, in your neighborhood and with your friends. Just gather a group of women. Have a discussion about the Beijing Platform. What interests the women in your group? Are they interested in global issues or ones at home? Educate each other. Encourage each other. Use the resource materials and the DVD. Think about all the places a circle could be created.

## **Critical Areas of Concern of the Beijing Platform for Action**

- The persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women
- Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to education and training
- Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to health care and related services
- Violence against women
- The effects of armed or other kinds of conflict on women, including those living under foreign occupation
- Inequality in economic structures and policies, in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources
- Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels
- Insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women
- Lack of respect for and inadequate promotion and protection of the human rights of women
- Stereotyping of women and inequality in women's access to and participation in all communication systems, especially in the media
- Gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment
- Persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl child

## Beijing Circles – A Place to Start

### Did you know?

As you come together in your circle, take turns reading the following statistics. Take time between readers to listen to what you've heard, and to listen to what's in your heart.

- *Eighty percent of the world's refugees are women and children.*
- *Of the world's one billion poorest people, an estimated three-fifths are women and girls.*
- *Of the nearly one billion adults in the world who cannot read, two-thirds are female.*
- *Women represent a growing proportion of people living with HIV/AIDS.*
- *Women continue to be under-represented in formal decision-making structures. To take one example, women hold only 14 percent of the seats in the U.S. Congress.*
- *Nineteen sub-Saharan African countries have female literacy rates below 30 percent and less than half of the girls (six through eleven years old) are estimated to be in school.*
- *In Bangladesh, less than one in every three women is literate. The situation is similar in many of the world's least-developed countries.*
- *Women born in Ethiopia have a life expectancy of 46.7 years.*
- *In Mexico, the average income for women is only slightly more than a third of their male counterparts.*
- *Two million girls each year are at risk of genital mutilation – approximately 6,000 per day.*
- *One in three women will experience violence during her lifetime – most often at the hands of people she knows.*
- *Two million girls under age 15 are forced into the sex trade each year.*
- *Complications from pregnancy and childbirth kill 500,000 women each year.*
- *Stillbirths or newborn deaths total an estimated eight million yearly, with the lack of obstetric care cited as the primary cause.*
- *About a third of all pregnancies each year – eighty million – are unintended or unwanted.<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> From "Women's Rights and Empowerment: The Millennium Development Goals and Gender Equity" (2004 United Nations' Day Community Organizers' Guide), Gender Inequality in Numbers, p. 31.

## Reflection

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue, named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.” So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.”

Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

Mark 5:21-34 – NRSV

*In an essay by Lieve Troch<sup>5</sup> she suggests “The classical way of working with this text focuses on the appraisal of Jesus, who ignores the laws of the outcast to which this woman belongs because of her loss of blood. In touching Jesus she comes to life and is no longer limited by her illness, which was related to her being a woman.”*

*But she continues in her essay by encouraging the reader to “focus on the action, courage, and endurance of the woman herself: she initiates; it is she who touches him, believing that her touch will be adequate. She breaks through the stigmatization of being an outcast, which leads to her full presence in the community – and ‘she told the whole truth.’”*

## Some things to think about

Consider the courage of the woman who touched Jesus. Unlike Jairus, she lived on the margins of the community.

Unlike Jairus, she is unnamed.

Perhaps we can honor this woman by bringing to mind the women we know who have showed such courage.

Perhaps we can honor this woman by bringing to heart our prayers for those whose names we do not know. Perhaps we can consider, not only that Jesus’ power provided physical healing, but that it also provided affirmation of an alternative world vision, where all are welcomed and made whole.

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<sup>5</sup> From Searching the Scriptures, edited by Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Crossroad Publishing, NY, 1993, p. 361.

Consider what new reality she is creating. As we remember the statistics we shared earlier, how might we think about creating new realities?

Consider that the woman told Jesus “the whole truth.” What might she have told him in addition to the fact that she was the one who touched him?

### **Action and Prayer**

Until the Circle meets again...

What will you take into your prayers?

Review the Beijing Platform for Action. Is there a particular area that draws you for: further exploration; more education; specific action?

What will you tell your family and friends and others in your congregation about what has happened in your Circle during this gathering?

Are there actions the Circle wishes to take together? Locally? Nationally? Internationally?

## The persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women . . .

Help us . . . HELP US . . . HELP US . . . Help us . . .  
HELP US . . . Help us . . . Help us . . . Help us . . .  
Help us . . . Help us . . .

They cried from the roof tops, and from trees,  
and from the interstate, from the rubble, from nursing homes,  
from attics, and from the water  
and finally . . . from under the water . . .

*As you come together in your circle, take time to consider the following, giving time to listen with heart and mind . . .*

### **Did you know?**

***“Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom.”<sup>6</sup>***

***“As our nation rebuilds the Gulf Coast region and begins a more frank national debate about racial and economic inequality, it is critical to look at women’s unique circumstances and strengths. The women in the three metropolitan areas devastated by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, like many women in the South, face multiple disadvantages, all of which must be understood in developing effective services and economic development strategies in the region. They are more likely to be poor and to lack health insurance and less likely to earn good wages than women elsewhere in the United States. They are also disproportionately African American and experience discrimination based on both race and sex. Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas rank in the bottom 10 among all the states in the nation on many of the indicators of women’s status calculated by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research.”<sup>7</sup>***

In an article entitled “Seeing and Not Seeing: Complicity in Surprise,” University of Iowa Anthropology Professor Virginia R. Dominguez suggests that perhaps it is our way of viewing the world that can help make a difference in how we approach the realities of poverty, racism and systemic discrimination.

She writes, “Something is clearly amiss if so many people are surprised by the images on television and shocked that it makes the US look like ‘the Third World’ (or, more likely,

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<sup>6</sup> Definition from The World Bank:

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/0,,contentMDK:20153855~menuPK:373757~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:336992,00.html>

<sup>7</sup> Briefing Paper #D464 – “The Women of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast: Multiple Disadvantages and Key Assets for Recovery – Part I. Poverty, Race, Gender and Class. Institute for Women’s Policy Research. [www.iwpr.org](http://www.iwpr.org)

their idea of something called ‘the Third World). We must ask why this message is not being heard or, if heard, not really understood. And, for the sake of the country and all of its people now and in the future, we must be willing to go wherever the answer(s) takes us – even if it leads us into the delicate terrain of our own complicity in continuing patterns of inherited social inequalities in the US.”<sup>8</sup>

Professor Dominguez cites Illinois Senator Barack Obama’s response to a question on ABC’s “This Week.” . . . “Whoever was in charge of planning,” he said, “was so detached from the realities of inner city life in New Orleans. . .that they couldn’t conceive of the notion that they couldn’t load up their SUV’s, put \$100 worth of gas in there, put in some sparkling water and drive off to a hotel and check in with a credit card.”

She also cites University of Virginia Law Professor Rosa Brooks who reminds us, “even using the federal government’s Scrooge-like definition, about 13 percent of Americans – and 18 percent of American children – live in poverty. They live in poverty all year round, not just on special occasions like during hurricanes. And they’re all over this nation, not just in New Orleans.” And then Professor Dominguez asks a very important question, “Where do we think those 37 million people live? . . . How can 37 million people be unseen?”

She continues, “The viewing public is now indeed seeing some of them. . .But how are *we* seeing *them*? This increasing talk of the US looking so ‘Third World’ is worrisome and telling. . .Seeing those New Orleanians on TV as ‘Third World’ is problematic even if it is understandable given lifelong habits of thought so widespread in the US that keep people from seeing its dangers. Mentally equating poor people with non-white people *and* both with ‘the Third World’ quietly allows viewers to slip easily into familiar forms of perception of the US, even when they appear new and surprising. One of its greatest dangers is that it mentally allows people to think that poverty and non-whiteness are non-American things...”

“Seeing doesn’t just happen. We learn to see things in certain ways. We teach others to do the same. And once we’re accustomed to it, we just do it, largely without noticing...”<sup>9</sup>

Help us . . . HELP US . . . HELP US . . . Help us . . .  
HELP US . . . Help us . . . Help us . . . Help us . . .  
Help us . . . Help us . . .

They cried from the roof tops, and from trees,  
and from the interstate, from the rubble, from nursing homes,  
from attics, and from the water  
and finally . . .from under the water . . .

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<sup>8</sup> “Seeing and Not Seeing: Complicity in Surprise,” by Virginia R. Dominguez. From the web site on “Understanding Katrina, Perspectives from the Social Sciences.”

<http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Dominguez/>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



## **Reflection**

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at this right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

*Matthew 25:31-40 NRSV*

Sometimes before we can see our way forward with those who suffer, we can only enter deeply into the suffering. Sometimes that means recognizing whether we have contributed to that suffering, knowingly or unknowingly.

Thirty-seven million people in this country live in poverty. Have you seen them? Have you seen them anywhere other than on the roof tops in New Orleans?

***“Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom.”<sup>10</sup>***

In hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the poor, both women and men, carried their poverty with them if they were lucky enough to make it out before the storm hit. Those who didn't have the resources to leave suffered greatly before they carried their poverty on whatever transport was finally offered to them from a dysfunctional emergency management system.

Have you seen them since? Who will hear them as decisions are being made? Will the rebuilding include places for them? Jobs for them? Safe spaces for their children?

Have 37 million poor once again become invisible? If so, how did that happen? If not, how do we know?

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<sup>10</sup> Definition from The World Bank:

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/0,,contentMDK:20153855~menuPK:373757~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:336992,00.html>

Do any of them live near you? And if not, who are the invisible poor in your community?

When did you last see Jesus? Or give a drink? Or find a home? Or protect from violence?

Help us . . . HELP US . . . HELP US . . . Help us . . .  
HELP US . . . Help us . . . Help us . . . Help us . . .  
Help us . . . Help us . . .

They cried from the roof tops, and from trees,  
and from the interstate, from the rubble, from nursing homes,  
from attics, and from the water  
and finally . . .from under the water . . .

### **Action and Prayer**

Until the circle meets again. . .

What will you take into your prayers?

What will you do, formally or informally, to make the invisible visible? To bring the voices of those in poverty to the tables of policy and decision-making?

Are there collective actions for the circle to take – locally? Nationally? Internationally?

## **Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to education and training. . .**

“Education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace... Investing in formal and non-formal education and training for girls and women, with its exceptionally high social and economic return, has proved to be one of the best means of achieving sustainable development and economic growth that is both sustained and sustainable.”<sup>11</sup>

*As you come together in your circle, take time to consider the following, giving time to listen with your mind and with your heart. . .*

### **Did you know?**

***Of the nearly one billion adults in the world who cannot read, two-thirds are female.***<sup>12</sup>

***In Bangladesh, less than one in three women is literate. The situation is very similar in many of the world’s least developed countries.***

***Nineteen sub-Saharan African countries have female literacy rates below 30 percent, and less than half the girls (six through eleven years old) are estimated to be in school.***

***Educating women is the second-highest way to eradicate disease and poverty in the developing world. The first is achieving equality between the sexes.***<sup>13</sup>

Anne Benvenuti was a 2006 Episcopal Church delegate to the UNCSW. When she returned home, she began using Circles to address important issues related to the Beijing Platform in her own context. This section on the need for adequate education for women is Anne’s work and part of her ongoing contribution to the church and to the world. She continues with the following quotes and reflections.

“The study found a woman's risk of being beaten, kicked or hit rose along with her level of education.... “Interpretation of this data needs to be done very sensitively,” warned Preet Rustagi, a junior fellow at the New Delhi-based Center for Women's Development Studies. “Education is an empowering tool for women and should not be seen as impacting negatively. In fact, this correlation points to the imperative need for an attitudinal change among men and society in general.”<sup>14</sup>

“... people do not lose their voices; they lose the desire or the courage or the will or the ability to use their voices to tell their stories.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. Beijing, China, September 1995:Action for Equality, Development and Peace.

<sup>12</sup> This and the following two statistics are taken from *Women’s Rights and Empowerment: The Millennium Development Goals and Gender Equity* (2004 United Nations’ Day Community Organizers’ Guide), Gender Inequality in Numbers, p 31.

<sup>13</sup> <http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/163084>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/1591>

<sup>15</sup> Gilligan, Carol, *The Birth of Pleasure*, Knopf, 2002, p.223.

“In the present day, power holds a smoother language, and whomsoever it oppresses, always pretends to do so for their own good: accordingly, when anything is forbidden to women, it is thought necessary to say, and desirable to believe, that they are incapable of doing it, and that they depart from their real path of success and happiness when they aspire to it....”<sup>16</sup>

“Would mankind be at all better off if women were free? If not, why disturb their minds, and attempt to make a social revolution in the name of an abstract right? ... The benefit to be expected from giving to women the free use of their faculties, by leaving them the free choice of their employments, and opening to them the same field of occupation and the same prizes and encouragements as to other human beings, would be that of doubling the mass of mental faculties available for the higher service of humanity.”<sup>17</sup>

“Why do we have to move to the new house? I like where we live. I don’t want to go to a new school.”

“It’s so that your brother can go to your father’s old school.”

“How come we have to move for him?”

“If you’d been a little boy, dear, we would have moved for you!”<sup>18</sup>

“She wanted me to grow up and marry a doctor, to be a rich and powerful man’s wife. I didn’t want to borrow a man’s power, but to find my own—to be the doctor rather than to marry him.”<sup>19</sup>

“They told me I couldn’t be a minister, but that if I wanted to, I could grow up and marry a minister. That was the right way for a woman to minister, they said.”<sup>20</sup>

“Hope is the most dangerous emotion: it invites us to imagine an escape from tragedy, it tempts what we have come to think of as fate... it heightens our awareness of vulnerability and, with it, the temptation to return at whatever cost to the known.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Mill, John Stuart, *The Subjugation of Women*, 1869, ch.3.

<sup>17</sup> Mill, ch.4.

<sup>18</sup> Conversation with her mother, at the age of 7, recounted by an English woman, c.1962.

<sup>19</sup> Borysenko, Joan, *A Woman’s Book of Life*, Riverhead Books, 1996, p.70.

<sup>20</sup> Episcopal priest recounting a comment from her youth group leader, c.1970.

<sup>21</sup> Gilligan, p.233.

## **Reflection**

In the course of their journey Jesus came to a village and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. She had a sister called Mary, who sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to him speaking. Now Martha who was distracted with all the serving said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do all the serving by myself? Please tell her to help me." But the Lord answered, "Martha, Martha, you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. Mary has chosen the better part; it is not to be taken from her." *Luke 10:38-42 -- NRSV*

Anne shares her thoughts on this reading. . .

The one sermon I have never heard preached on this gospel passage is the one in which we are invited to consider that, in some cases, a person may be virtuous because she chooses the best portion for herself. Mary chose not to serve, as expected, but to participate in the world of thought and learning; she chose that portion typically reserved for men, and Jesus said that it would not be denied her.

In my work as a psychologist, I have seen repeatedly the need for women to love themselves as they love others, to choose for example, the development of their own potential over the services supposedly required in order to develop someone else's potential. They frequently do not see the ways in which their endless service and self-sacrifice undermines the goodness of others by requiring so little of them, or the way that it creates in the serving woman herself that creeping shadow of the embittered martyr.

Can you imagine this picnic in the park? See the women popping open their refreshing drinks, reaching for the best cuts of meat, the biggest portions of dessert, and sitting down to discuss politics and needlework with each other, while the men care for the children, and replenish the food?

The deep roots of women's service, self-sacrifice, and compliance do not mean that these are always good, much less the best course.

Consider this example: Rosa Parks chose to remain in the seat she had chosen in the bus. She was told to vacate her seat for a white man under threat of arrest. "You may do that," she replied to the bus driver. The rest is history, and Rosa Parks was the first woman ever to lie in state in the Rotunda of the Capital Building in Washington, D.C. "The only tired I was, was tired of giving in," she said of her famous bus ride. And she told interviewers that her grandfather had taught her to understand that it was never acceptable for someone to mistreat her. So, when Rosa chose her own interests and her own dignity, she changed a nation and she changed the world.

Pause to consider . . .

What if Mary had helped Martha instead of sitting with Jesus and the other men?

What if Rosa had given up her seat, as demanded by the white male bus driver, and as required by law?

What happens when women spend their lives supporting the realization of men's potential? What are the consequences for their souls? For their daughters and families? For their communities and for our world?

What are we teaching girls about the way the world should be?

Is there somewhere in your life where you know you should be choosing the better part, where you have lost the ability to use your voice to claim it? What would it take for you to make that choice? How might your "selfish" choice better the world?

Is there something you wanted to be or do, but could not because of your being female?

Is there a way for you to support the realizing of women's self-potential? What would you feel about making women's potential a high priority?<sup>22</sup>

### **Action and Prayer**

Until the circle meets again...

What will you take into your prayers?

What will you do, formally or informally, to support education of girls and women?

Are there collective actions for the circle to take—locally? Nationally? Internationally?

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<sup>22</sup> Anne Benvenuti, United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, 2006, [anne.benvenuti@gmail.com](mailto:anne.benvenuti@gmail.com)

**Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to health care and related services. . .**

“Just about the worst thing that can happen to a teenage girl in this world is to develop an obstetric fistula that leaves her trickling bodily wastes, stinking and shunned by everyone around her.”

Nicholas D. Kristof – in an article entitled “The Illiterate Surgeon” published by the New York Times June 12, 2005

*As you come together in your circle, take time to consider the following, giving time to listen with mind and heart. . .*

**Did you know?**

*The Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing) Platform for Action put forward the groundbreaking concept that the right of women to control their sexuality—the basis for sexual rights—is an indivisible part of their human rights, and that without it, women cannot fully realize their other human rights.<sup>23</sup>*

*Entire societies suffer if:*

- *Women and girls cannot control the circumstances under which they have sex, and if, when, and how often they become pregnant.*
- *Women and girls cannot live healthy lives free from violence, coercion, sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, and discrimination.*
- *Women and girls lack access to the basic information and services they need to achieve sexual and reproductive health.<sup>24</sup>*

*Sexual rights include the right to say NO. . .*

*To violence*

*To rape*

*To harassment*

*To discrimination*

*To trafficking*

*To forced marriage*

*To abuse<sup>25</sup>*

Kristof writes about how an obstetric fistula typically arises: “a teenage girl, often malnourished and with an immature pelvis, tries to deliver her first baby. The fetus gets stuck, and after several days of labor it is stillborn – but some of the mother’s internal tissues have been damaged in that time, and so to her horror she finds herself constantly trickling urine or sometimes feces from her vagina.

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<sup>23</sup> From the web site of the International Women’s Health Coalition: [www.iwhc.org](http://www.iwhc.org)

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Soon she stinks. Her husband normally abandons her, the constant trickle . . . leaves her with terrible sores on her legs, and if she survives at all she is told to build a hut away from the rest of the village and to stay away from the village well. Some girls die of infections or suicide, but many linger for decades as pariahs and hermits – their lives effectively over at the age of about 15.”<sup>26</sup>

The story that Kristof tells is about a woman in Ethiopia who, by some miracle many years ago, was taken to a hospital that offered the surgery that would correct her condition. She was 15 years old. After her surgery she remained at the hospital making beds. After a while she began helping with the surgeries and ultimately came into her own as a specialist in this sort of operation – all without ever having gone to school. Most women in her part of the world are not so lucky.

Kristof suggests that this should be “an international scandal, because a \$300 operation can normally repair the injury.”

Women in our part of the world seldom need to deal with this condition, but US policy often influences women’s health around the world. Political zeal for or against abortion tends to obscure the many, many health-related issues women are struggling with everywhere, along with the underlying causes of those issues.

We are reminded in a publication produced by the Women’s Environment and Development Organization that:

- Worldwide, poor maternal health and maternal mortality remain problems for women (and thus for their families) – more than 500,000 die worldwide every year from pregnancy-related causes. In Bangladesh, maternal mortality accounts for 37 percent of all deaths.
- In Japan, discussion of sexual and reproductive health rights is still taboo. In 1999, a sex education book was produced for junior high school students with information about marriage, unwanted pregnancy and contraception. However, after criticism from conservative groups, circulation of the book was stopped, despite the fact that sexually transmitted diseases are rapidly increasing among teenagers and the rate of teenage abortions has doubled since 1995.
- Samoa, in keeping with cultural values concerning female premarital chastity, will not provide contraceptives to unmarried women and many young women, even in countries where contraception is available on request, are too embarrassed or ill-informed to seek the service.
- The policies of the current administration in the US affect the lives, not only of women in the US, but others around the world. In 2001, the Mexico City Policy, also known as the Global Gag Rule was reinstated. This policy denies foreign organizations receiving US family planning assistance the right to use their own non-US funds to provide legal abortions, counsel or refer abortions, or lobby for

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<sup>26</sup> “The Illiterate Surgeon,” by Nicholas D. Kristof, published by the New York Times (Op/Ed) June 12, 2005.



the legalization of abortion in their country. This policy endangers the lives of women by withholding funding, technical assistance and US-donated contraceptives (including condoms) from organizations that refuse to comply.<sup>27</sup> (All this from a country where abortion is legal.)

We also know that cultural contexts directly affect women's health. For example, in some places in Africa men believe that if they have sexual intercourse with virgins (including tiny, tiny girls) they will be cured of AIDS.

In some cultures, a man may have multiple sexual partners (or wives), potentially infecting all of them with HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases. Sometimes even if a clinic is available, a woman cannot travel alone for treatment because it is socially unacceptable. Women have become the face of AIDS worldwide, not only infected with HIV and suffering the effects of AIDS themselves, but also giving birth to children who are infected.

While it is reproductive health that is primarily addressed in this section, it is important to remember that access to health care for women and men is an issue in most parts of the world, including our own.

In the US, "There are significant disparities in the incidence of disease between white women and women of color. Many of these disparities can be linked to disparities in health coverage. In 2001, 16 percent of white women lacked health coverage, compared to 20 percent of African American and 37 percent of Latina women who lacked coverage.

In February of 2004, the US Government confessed to altering a report to falsify data on health disparities such as hypertension, diabetes and HIV, all disproportionately affecting women of color. This blatant disregard for scientific data and citizen well-being was only reversed after strong public objection, and it stands as a glaring example of the obstacles to women of color's equal access to health in the US."<sup>28</sup>

Who is without access to health care in your community? What do our daughters and nieces and sisters and mothers need to know about their own health and about the health of our sisters around the world?

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<sup>27</sup> Beijing Betrayed, produced by the Women's Environment and Development Organization, 355 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017, © 2005. pp. 26-28.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 165

## **Reflection**

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." *Luke 1:39-45 – NRSV*

Wanted, loved, protected, conceived and announced by God. In this way Mary the God bearer, brought Jesus into the world. Jesus, whose body we are now trusted to be.

And so as Christ's body, how might we protect those of our sisters who seek an Elizabeth, a clinic, a protector like Joseph, nudged by God – nudged by God to see to caretaking in the midst of a process he did not understand.

Often the birth of a child is a happy thing. But more than half a million women die every year from pregnancy-related causes. As sisters and companions, how is it we can say, "Blessed are you among women?"

Luke's story of Mary's visit to Elizabeth follows with what we know as the "Song of Mary."

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord  
My spirit rejoices in God my savior  
For he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. . .

Mary continues her song to the God that she knows has lifted up the lowly, the God who blesses the poor, the oppressed and the hungry. As one commentary suggests, "To confess that God is our Savior means that we will not look to some other power for salvation from the chaos we have created. Neither technology nor social progress, neither education nor legislated reforms will deliver us in and of themselves from meaningless lives . . . God may use any of these processes, but the basis of our trust, hope and commitment should be clear: God is our Savior."<sup>29</sup>

Grounded in the God of Mary, Elizabeth and Jesus, how will we consider the health of our sisters?

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<sup>29</sup> The New Interpreters Bible, Volume X, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1995. p. 56

## **Action and Prayer**

Until the circle meets again. . .

What will you take into your prayers?

What will you do, formally or informally, to address the issue of women's health?

Are there collective actions for the circle to take – locally? Nationally? Internationally?

## Violence against women . . .

*As you come together in your circle, take time to consider the following, giving time to listen with mind and heart. . .*

*We offer our gratitude to The Rev. Elizabeth Davenport and Anne Benvenuti for their offering of this unit of study and reflection.*

### **Did you know?**

Around the world, one in three women are beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused over the course of their lifetime. Most often, the abuser is a member of the woman's own family.<sup>30</sup>

Physical violence in intimate relationships is often accompanied by psychological abuse, and it is accompanied by sexual abuse in almost 50% of cases.<sup>31</sup>

Emerging studies show a strong relationship between domestic violence and the spread of HIV/AIDS in the developing world. The combination of violence and poverty forces many women to remain in violent and dangerous relationships where they are often subject to rape and HIV infection by their HIV-positive partners. In fact, recent research in Uganda shows that abusive men often intentionally infect their partners with HIV.<sup>32</sup>

Women who are abused run twice the risk of miscarriage and four times the risk of having a baby that is below average weight.<sup>33</sup>

In the United States, the health care cost of intimate partner violence against women totals \$5.8 billion each year.<sup>34</sup>

In Nicaragua, research has shown that children of women who are abused by their partners are six times more likely to die before the age of five than other children.<sup>35</sup>

A large study of India found that 43.5 percent of women reported that they were psychologically abused by their partners, and 40.3 percent reported that they were physically abused. Fifty percent of women who were physically abused reported violence during pregnancy.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Heise, Lori, Mary Ellsberg, and Megan Gottemoeller. *Ending Violence Against Women*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health, Population Information Program, 1999.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> *Just Die Quietly: Domestic Violence and Women's Vulnerability to HIV in Uganda*. Report, Human Rights Watch, 2003.

<sup>33</sup> *World Development Report: Investing in Health*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1993.

<sup>34</sup> *Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003, [http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/ipv\\_cost/IPVBook-Final-Feb18.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/ipv_cost/IPVBook-Final-Feb18.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> Heise, Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> *Domestic Violence in India: A Summary Report of a Multi-Site Household Survey*. International Center for Research on Women, Washington, DC, 2003.

When, in a meeting of Europeans, I found that the term ‘passive resistance’ was too narrowly construed – that it was supposed to be a weapon of the weak, that it could be characterized by hatred, and that it could finally manifest itself as violence – I had to demur to all these statements and explain the real nature of the Indian movement. It was clear that a new word must be coined by the Indians to designate their struggle.<sup>37</sup>

I thus began to call the Indian movement *Satyagraha*, that is to say, the Force which is born of Truth and Love or non-violence.<sup>38</sup>

Atrocities are actions so horrifying they go beyond words. For people who witness or experience atrocities, there is a kind of silencing that comes from not knowing how to put these experiences into speech. At the same time, atrocities are the crimes perpetrators most want to hide. This creates a powerful convergence of interest: no one wants to speak about them. No one wants to remember them. Everyone wants to pretend they didn’t happen.<sup>39</sup>

After I was attacked, my hands trembled for several months. Sometimes people would ask about my obvious tremor, and, if I told them I had acquired it after being attacked by a stranger in the wee hours of the morning in my own apartment, they became obviously upset, not that it had happened to me, but that I was telling them about it. They didn’t want to know; they changed the subject quickly.<sup>40</sup>

The perpetrators of these atrocities share a deeply unifying belief in their own separateness and superiority, and a tightly rationalized belief in the rightness of their actions.... Underlying the different forms of coercion is a unifying factor: silence. The necessity of silencing victims before, during, and after exploitation... and the necessity at these times of silencing one’s own conscience and one’s conscious awareness of relationship is undeniable.<sup>41</sup>

Crimes of honor are committed with varying degrees of intensity in the Middle East, South America and Southern Asia, as in the past in the Mediterranean basin; a man has impunity to kill any woman suspected of dishonoring his family; she is seen as a symbol or piece of property rather than as a human being.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Mohandas K. Gandhi, as cited at <http://www.mkgandhi.org/nonviolence/birthsatyagraha.htm>

<sup>38</sup> Mohandas K. Gandhi, as cited at <http://www.algonet.se/~jviklund/gandhi/ENG.NV.sat.html>

<sup>39</sup> Jenkins, Derek. *A Language Older Than Words*. Context Books, 2000:347.

<sup>40</sup> Anne Benvenuti, personal testimony.

<sup>41</sup> Jenkins, *ibid*.

<sup>42</sup> United Nations study, 2004. [http://www.wunrn.com/research/factual\\_aspects/stories/04-20-04Report](http://www.wunrn.com/research/factual_aspects/stories/04-20-04Report)  
UNHRCCommis04full

Nonviolent resistance does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent, but to win his friendship and understanding... We are out to defeat injustice and not white persons who may happen to be unjust.<sup>43</sup>

This method [nonviolence] is passive physically but strongly active spiritually; it is nonaggressive physically but dynamically aggressive spiritually.<sup>44</sup>

Hope is the most dangerous emotion: it invites us to imagine an escape from tragedy, it tempts what we have come to think of as fate... it heightens our awareness of vulnerability and, with it, the temptation to return at whatever cost to the known.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., writing of nonviolent direct action in the struggle for civil rights, 1957, as cited at [http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/about\\_king/encyclopedia/nonviolence](http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/about_king/encyclopedia/nonviolence)

<sup>44</sup> King, *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Carol Gilligan, *The Birth of Pleasure: A New Map of Love*. New York: Borzoi Press, 2002:233.

## **Reflection**

The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman along who had been caught committing adultery; and making her stand there in full view of everybody, they said to Jesus, “Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, and Moses has ordered us in the Law to condemn women like this to death by stoning. What have you to say?” They asked him this as a test, looking for something to use against him. But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. As they persisted with their question, he looked up and said, “If there is one among you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” Then he bent down and wrote on the ground again. When they heard this, they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, until Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained standing there. He looked up and said, “Woman, where are they?”<sup>46</sup>

Adultery, illicit sexual relations with someone other than one’s marriage partner. In the Old Testament, adultery had a precise *and limited* definition: sexual relations between a married (or betrothed) woman and any man other than her husband. Adultery, therefore, was committed only against a husband, never against a wife.<sup>47</sup>

Does it matter that the law was not fair? What does it mean for our lives and our moral characters – as women and men – that laws are frequently written to protect one gender at the expense of the other?

What might Jesus have been writing on the ground? What do you wish he were writing?

What is Jesus writing about this scenario today?

Will the day come when Jesus looks up at us, the women of this generation and says to us, “Woman, where are they?”

What would it mean for humanity if violence against women were stopped?

Is there a silence that you might break, either by speaking or by listening?

## **Action and Prayer**

Until the circle meets again. . .

What will you take into your prayers?

What will you do, formally or informally, to address violence and non-violence?

Are there collective actions for the circle to take – locally? Nationally? Internationally?

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<sup>46</sup> John 8:3-10.

<sup>47</sup> Achtemeier, Paul, ed. *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*. Harper Collins, 1996:14, italics mine.

**The effects of armed or other kinds of conflict on women,  
including those living under foreign occupation. . .**

“Through our encounter with the Women’s Legal Aid Society in Ramallah we learned about the suffering and struggles of young pregnant Palestinian women, both Christian and Muslim, dying at the check points because they are refused entrance into Jerusalem and hospitals if they do not have Israeli identification or a pass.”

The Rev. Joanna Graham  
2005 and 2006 Episcopal Church Delegate to the UNCSW

*As you come together in your circle, take time to consider the following, giving time to listen with mind and heart. . .*

**Did you know?**

***“In armed conflicts raging around the globe, soldiers and paramilitaries terrorize women with rape, sexual and other physical violence, and harassment. These tactics are tools of war, instruments of terror designed to hurt and punish women, wrench communities apart, and force women and girls to flee their homes. Women in Sudan, Iraq, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina have reported brutal rapes, sexual assaults, sexual slavery, and mutilation committed by male combatants. In some cases, perpetrators first raped then killed their victims. Those who survived the attacks suffered from psychological trauma, permanent physical injury, and long-term health risks, especially HIV/AIDS.***

***Often, the end of war does not signal the end of violations against women. In the post-conflict period, many women confront discrimination in reconstruction programs, sexual and domestic violence in refugee camps, and violence when they attempt to return to their homes. . .***

***Until recently, many viewed violence against women as an inevitable, if regrettable, consequence of war. This attitude guaranteed impunity for perpetrators, effectively silencing women who suffered gruesome sexual and physical abuses. The creation of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, and the International Criminal Court hold out some hope that women in war-torn countries might finally gain greater access to justice for crimes of sexual violence. Since 1998, these tribunals have convicted individuals of rape as an instrument of genocide, a form of torture, and a crime against humanity”.***<sup>48</sup>

***Amnesty International reports, “Although less likely than men to be combatants, women constitute the greatest proportion of the adult civilian population killed in war***

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<sup>48</sup> From the web site of Human Rights Watch – Overview of Women and Armed Conflict.  
<http://www.hrw.org/women/conflict.html>



***and targeted for abuse. Women suffer severe physical, economic, and psychological hardships during periods of armed conflict.”<sup>49</sup>***

After attending the 49<sup>th</sup> United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNSCW), Joanna Graham, a priest in the Diocese of New Jersey, formed a Beijing Circle which she called ‘Putting our Faith and Words into Action.’ This is what she shared about her initiative.

A land flowing with milk and honey, a land that I had always wanted to visit – the home of my father, mother, brother and sister, Jesus my God. From a Christian perspective and that of a woman, I longed, as a little child, to go to this far away land that was the birthplace of my freedom and my religion.

Now decades later I was at a place in my life where I could pursue my dream and God’s calling. It came to pass in 2005 when I met the delegate from the Diocese of Jerusalem to the 49<sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women. As delegates from all over the Anglican Communion, and the world, we came together in a sisterhood and as advocates for peace and justice for women in a world torn with strife.

We not only learned about the CSW, but about our Anglican sisters throughout the world. We learned of their joys as well as their hardships and the difficulties that women face in their daily lives because of discrimination. We learned that Anglican women are raising their voices against injustice and adding their voices, with a spiritual dimension, to the voices of other women throughout the world.

The Episcopal Palestinian delegate and I connected and became friends. I must say that when I learned she was Palestinian, I took a step back. My images of Palestinians had been more or less based on what we see in the news. The media in our country have a way of portraying only the negative qualities of people in the Middle East.

My new friend invited me and a small delegation of women on a fact finding trip to Israel and Palestine. We ventured forth in August 2005 with the Beijing Platform for Action in our minds. I was deeply committed to implementing the goal of the Platform which deals with the area of armed conflict. It states that: ...” peace is a prerequisite for the attainment of equality between women and men. Though women rarely have a role in the decisions leading to armed conflict, they work to preserve the social order in the midst of conflict and can be important participants in peace education.”

My friend arranged our tour, introducing us to many women’s organizations that are dedicated to helping the impoverished women and children of Palestine. We also attended the Women in Black Conference, a world wide network of women which began in Israel 17 years ago. We interviewed many women from both Israel and Palestine who are striving in a non-violent way for peace in their countries. They use non-violent protest as a way to make their voices heard. Eight hundred women gathered from around

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<sup>49</sup> From Amnesty International’s Fact Sheet on Women and Armed Conflict:  
<http://www.amnesty.usa.org/stopviolence/factsheets/armedconflict.html>

the world to support their efforts. The conference lasted for five days and women from conflict areas all over the world shared their experiences.

As a priest I wore my collar as a visible representative of the Episcopal Church in America. I was greeted warmly and confronted appropriately; in particular during a workshop on the effect of the 30-foot high wall that cuts through Palestinian land. It was sad to realize that our country is not held in favor by many countries. We are seen as an imperialist power by many and this has brought disenchantment with our efforts to help the deeply violated in both countries. We learned that militarism in both Israel and Palestine has severely affected the lives of women and children on both sides of the conflict.

In interviewing women in the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, we learned that the number of Palestinian Christians is slowly diminishing, and we learned about women and children living behind the Wall that encircles Bethany and Bethlehem and winds through many small villages throughout Palestine. It separates and disconnects them from their families, work and each other. They live in fear each day, not only for themselves, but for their children, particularly their young sons. They are deeply concerned about the continued building of the Wall through Jerusalem that will further cut off 55,000 Palestinian residences from the rest of the city.

They are faced with daily restrictions: check points, indiscriminate questioning done in military and police quarters, and random checks imposed on them. They cannot travel without a permit or passbook, which is issued and controlled by Israel. The occupation has deeply affected all their lives. They told us they feel powerless and asked for our help. They stated that they are not only disempowered by the occupation, but also by the hierarchy of the church, a dominant patriarchal society with tribal customs.

This is a spiritual crisis. In the midst of this hideous life our Anglican sisters are isolated, depressed and filled with a sense of powerlessness. Our Christian sisters living in Palestine, the Holy Land of our heritage, are living in a militaristic society in fear for their lives and those of their loved ones. They are isolated from other women in their Diocese which includes Syria, Jordan and Libya. They said that all around them Muslim and Jewish women have joined together to speak their versions of truth about the occupation, the Wall, and the impact upon their lives. The Christian women are asking their Anglican sisters for help, support and education about Anglican Women's Empowerment and about the Beijing Platform for Action. They want to "activate," and learn how to speak in one voice in non-violent protest. Peace education and empowerment are critical factors.

We will return to Jerusalem at Christmas in 2007 to surround the Wall....

## **Reflection**

*“Peace is not something you wish for, it’s something you make, something you do, something you are, something you give away.” (Mother Teresa)<sup>50</sup>*

Sometimes it’s difficult for us to imagine what it must be like to live in the midst of war. It is difficult to imagine that the only way to obtain food or maintain safety for our children might be to provide sexual favors to the soldiers outside our houses or our tents. It is difficult to imagine that women on the African continent have been raped and beaten in war torn countries, and then left to die. But close your eyes and try to imagine.

Some of our sisters in other parts of our world are suffering.

Sometimes miracles have happened when women have asked men  
to put down their arms.

But often the war goes on.

The women suffer.

See them, hold them in your heart, and pray for them.

Give voice to their need...to their suffering...to their hope.

“Do not weep for me,” Jesus told the women – but for yourselves and your children.

Weep.

Think in the safety of your circle about the times you have made peace.

Bless each other for doing so.

Think in the safety of your circle about how you might make peace together.

There is a song in New Zealand about the Jesus who came singing peace.

How will you continue the song?

*O God, you have bound us together in a common life. Help us, in the midst of our struggles for justice and truth, to confront one another without hatred or bitterness, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

From the Book of Common Prayer, page 824

Until the circle meets again. . .

What will you take into your prayers?

What will you do, formally or informally, to learn about or bring peace to reality?

Are there collective actions for the circle to take – locally? Nationally? Internationally?

### **Inequalities in economic structures and policies, in all forms**

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<sup>50</sup> [www.overcomingviolence.org](http://www.overcomingviolence.org) Thus begins the booklet “Why Violence, Why not Peace?” produced by the World Council of Churches as a guide for the Decade to Overcome Violence. The guide is downloadable and available in many languages.

**Inequalities in economic structures and policies, in all forms of  
of productive activities and in access to resources**

“Why, for example, should wall cleaners, who are mainly men,  
earn more than floor cleaners, who are mainly women, when they work in the same  
public hospital in the UK?”

Nora Wintour, Public Services International<sup>51</sup>

**Did you know?**<sup>52</sup>

*Women are working, but poverty is not being eradicated: of the 550 million working poor in the world, approximately 330 million are women.*

*According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), an estimated 36.5 million people of working age have HIV and by 2005 [now past] the global labour force will have lost as many as 28 million workers due to AIDS since the start of the epidemic.*

*Both legally and illegally, women are increasingly migrating and female migrants are among the workers most vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.*

*When women’s daily tasks include collecting fuelwood, dung, water, food and medicinal plants, deterioration of the local environment or loss of access to resources make women’s work more difficult.*

*Religious, cultural and ethnic fundamentalist groups throughout the world. . .are attempting to define who has the right to work and to education along gender lines.*

*In Chile, 75% of women in the agricultural sector are on temporary contracts picking fruit, working more than 60 hours a week during the fruit-picking season. One in three earns less than minimum wage. (Oxfam, “Trading Our Rights”)*

*In Kenya, interviews with 400 women working on coffee and tea plantations and in textile plants revealed that 90% had experienced or witnessed sexual abuse on the job. (Christian Science Monitor)*

*In China’s Guangdong province, one of the world’s fastest growing industrial areas, young women face 150 hours of overtime each month in the garment factories. 60% have no written contract and 90% have no access to social insurance. (Oxfam, “Trading Away Our Rights”)*

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<sup>51</sup> From “Women’s Rights and Economic Change,” – Facts and Issues Paper, No. 10, August 2004. Produced by the Association for Women’s Rights in Development, Toronto, Canada. [www.awid.org](http://www.awid.org)

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. All items listed in this section are from the paper mentioned above. Please note the paper was written by Alison Symington; Research Assistance by Janice Duddy; Copy-edit, Carly Zwarenstein and Design by Lina Gomez. The content may be reproduced only for educational purposes.

***Latin America is the most dangerous place in the world for trade unionists. In 2002, 184 trade unionists were murdered in Colombia alone. (American Center for International Labor Solidarity/AFL-CIO)***

***In the United States, 33% of low-wage working women did not have paid sick leave in 2000; that jumped to 45% in 2004. (Christian Science Monitor)***

***1.6 million women work for Wal-Mart, the largest private sector employer in the US. A class action lawsuit was brought against the retailer alleging systematic bias against women in pay and promotion. (Christian Science Monitor)***

The issue of women and economic development is multi-layered. It is perhaps one of the areas of the Beijing Platform for Action where we can most clearly see the relationships between poverty, health conditions, violence, the appropriate or inappropriate use of natural resources, and human rights.

What are the economic opportunities for women in your community? We often cite the statistic that women make only 77 percent of what men earn in the US. But in the context of our privilege, we often think about that 77 percent, albeit unfair, as it relates to the kind of wage common to middle and upper middle class America.

A woman who works at minimum wage (\$5.85 in 2007), even at 40 hours per week, makes slightly over \$12,000 per year (gross salary). The minimum wage will rise around one percent through 2009. (\$6.55 in 2008 and \$7.25 in 2009) The recent rate of inflation was about three percent.

Think of what a family needs to survive. How many gallons of milk can you buy for \$5.85? How many gallons of gas?

How much will \$12,000 buy?

If she is lucky enough to find a job for \$10 an hour, she will make just under \$21,000 per year (gross salary).

Think of what a family needs to survive.

How much will \$21,000 buy?

While the need for child care, food stamps, health care access and access to public transportation have been part of public discussion in the past few decades, recent actions by Congress and the Administration have continued to cut supplements and assistance to the poorest of the poor.

Do you know them?

## **Reflection**

We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Phillipi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. On the Sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us saying, “if you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.” And she prevailed upon us.

*Acts 16:11-15 – NRSV*

God’s grace transcends cultural expectations! Lydia appears independent, speaking of her own household, not of a husband or his household. She not only invites Paul and the others, but her home ultimately becomes a gathering for the fledgling Christian community.

Margaret Rose writes, “Though Lydia may have been the exception rather than the rule, she was clearly a woman of means. Likely, she was unmarried or a widow, a head of household whose resources and sense of self worth permitted her to invite, indeed persuade Paul and his companions to stay at her house. The Biblical witness of women who used economic and social power in the world of business and in their households counteracts those biblical interpretations which insist women remain silent and passive. Lydia claimed her power. And in that claiming she offers women of faith a witness for their own economic and social empowerment.”<sup>53</sup>

In her new book on the friendship of women, Joan Chittister reminds us that Lydia was a seller of purple, and thus someone who likely dealt with people who made clothes for kings. She reminds us that as a woman of means Lydia used her influence by the grace of God and for the benefit of the Christian community.

Do you have a friend like Lydia? Or are you a Lydia who might step out with assurance in action for others? How might we use our influence for the advancement of women’s economic rights both here and abroad?

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<sup>53</sup> From “I Rise, I Rise and I Rise Again,” a Devotional Booklet prepared for the Ecumenical Team attending the 50<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, compiled by Kathleen Stone. The Rev. Margaret Rose is the Director of the Office for Women’s Ministries at the Episcopal Church Center.

## **Action and Prayer**

Until the circle meets again. . .

What will you take into your prayers?

What will you do, formally or informally, to support or learn about the economic rights of women? Who will you talk to?

Are there collective actions for the circle to take – locally? Nationally? Internationally?

**Inequality between men and women in the sharing  
of power and decision-making at all levels. . .**

“All humanity must participate in God’s mission of transformation and reconciliation. What I have observed is that women, their voices and gifts, are not adequately represented at the decision-making tables of our National and International church. Therefore, their gifts, insights and agendas are not shaping the policies formed at those tables and their voices are not heard in their public church arenas.”

Phoebe Griswold  
From a speech given to the Annual Conference of the  
Companions of the Holy Cross  
August 2, 2005

*As you come together in your circle, take time to consider the following, giving time to  
listen with mind and heart. . .*

**Did you know?**

***Did you know that The Anglican Communion spans 165 countries and embraces approximately 75 million people who are organized into 38 regional or national Provinces? The history, the structures and identity of the Anglican Communion create accessible networks, if you will, over which we can travel in order to live out the mission of the Church which is to “restore all people to unity with God and each other.” Were you aware that at the Office of the Episcopal Church residing at 815 Second Avenue in New York are gateways to the global Anglican Communion through the Programs established by the General Convention?<sup>54</sup>***

***The Anglican Communion, as one historian said, “Just happened!” It is an organic system made up of a fellowship or communion of churches which is constantly evolving. The structures that hold us together and that speak for us are emerging in the same way. There is no overarching plan for how the Institution of the Anglican Communion should look. Instead, there are several threads that define the structures. One of these threads is known as the four Instruments of Unity. They are the Archbishop of Canterbury, the 38 Primates, the Lambeth Conference (a gathering of 700 bishops every ten years), and the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), a representative body of both lay people and clergy from each of the 38 Provinces. Of these 800 plus people who sit at the decision-making tables of our global church, 30 are women!<sup>55</sup>***

Phoebe goes on to say, “I think that this is a question of gender injustice because of the lack of representation for the majority of the Communion. Equally important is the mind

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<sup>54</sup> These programs include Episcopal Relief and Development, Episcopal Migration Ministries, Episcopal Public Policy Network, Women’s Ministries, Mission Personnel, Anglican and Global Relations, United Thank Offering and others. Please see [www.episcopalchurch.org](http://www.episcopalchurch.org) – paragraph above taken from the aforementioned speech by Phoebe Griswold.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.



boggling absence of those gifts that women bring, the greatest of which is perhaps our natural bent for connecting and building relationships from which spring the joy and energy and courage to fix things and the wisdom to name those immediate challenges for the welfare of the whole creation. . .

I like to imagine ourselves, women, as the unofficial fifth instrument of unity in the Anglican Communion without getting caught up in the structural battles going on. Because we are not about structures, but about relationships, our instrument is fundamentally different.

. . . one of the most significant movements in the Anglican Communion today, a world wide community of women gathered under the auspices of the Anglican Observer to the UN in partnership with the Office for Women's Ministries and several other offices at the National Church Center, is called Anglican Women's Empowerment (AWE). . .

The blue print for the work of these meetings is the Beijing Platform for Action. . . In 2004, 40 women attended, 15 from the wider Communion, and in 2005, 81 women attended, 41 from the wider communion.<sup>56</sup> We had the largest non-profit delegation at the UN Commission on the Status of Women. You would have been proud of your Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion for their contributions both in presentations from their local regions and in their political savvy to help shape the outcome so that the reaffirmation of the Beijing Platform was not derailed by the U.S.

Our delegates prepared statements about women's representation and the issues they cared about. The immediate result has been recommendations presented to The Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) in June (2005), all of which were passed and in fact some were strengthened. Gender Equity as stated in the Millennium Development Goals was adopted by the ACC and all church bodies are to work towards the realization of this goal. It is a seismic statement for our Communion. . .<sup>57</sup>

What I have experienced more than anything else over these last eight years is that in this seemingly chaotic time in our history, not knowing the whole picture and being constantly bombarded by disturbing news, that we as a community of Christian women throughout the world can choose as Christ's disciples to lead people to transformation and reconciliation. And where do we start? The delegate from Burundi said that in her country when a young girl is overwhelmed with her mother's instructions to sweep the hard red clay in front of their hut, the mother says, 'Just start sweeping at your feet.'<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> It should be noted that in 2006 – since this speech was delivered, over 100 women gathered, more than two-thirds from the larger Communion (virtually every Province of the Communion was represented) and approximately one-third from the Episcopal Church here, with geographical representation from across our country and the other countries who share in our Province of the Communion.

<sup>57</sup> Please see the "Additional Resources" section of this booklet for a collection of statements.

<sup>58</sup> The speech continues briefly and only a small portion of it is included here.

## Reflection

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him.” Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem, and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

*Luke 24:13-35 – NRSV*

In this familiar and beautiful story, Jesus appears to two of the disciples on the evening of the Resurrection Day. Only one of the disciples is named – Cleopas. Often we assume that the other is also male. But there is nothing in this story that indicates that. In fact the story reminds us that in Jerusalem, the apostles have companions with them – both women and men.

Take a few minutes of quiet and imagine that the companion of Cleopas is a woman and that, in partnership, they traveled the road to Emmaus. They heard the voice of Jesus together, and they were astonished together. As a woman and a man, their hearts burned within them in the presence of the Risen Christ and together, in partnership, they returned to Jerusalem to tell the story.

What feelings did you have, or insights did you glean when you re-imagined the story? Knowing history as we do, we are not surprised that most of the time it is assumed that

there were two men on the road. Knowing Jesus as we do, we realize the full possibility of the image of radical equality. The story tells us that earlier that same day, Jesus had first appeared to the women.

Their hearts burned within them.

Is it not so that our longing for a different reality can only begin if we can imagine that reality? And so we have imagined the depth and joy and potential of a real partnership between two lovers of Jesus, one male, one female.

Have you experienced such a time in your own life?

At the gatherings of the Anglican Consultative Council's delegation to the UNCSW, often women tell the Jesus story to each other. Often their hearts burn with the reality of Jesus and the hope of another way. Their commitment is to transformation and healing, for all people, beginning with equality for women, thus enriching the partnerships between all people.

### **Action and Prayer**

Until the circle meets again. . .

What will you take into your prayers?

What will you do, formally or informally, to support or advance the cause of equality between men and women in power and decision-making? If you begin sweeping at your feet, where might that take you?

Are there collective actions for the circle to take – locally? Nationally? Internationally?

## **Insufficient mechanisms for the advancement of women . . .**

“At the regional and international levels, mechanisms and institutions to promote the advancement of women as an integral part of mainstream political, economic, social and cultural development, and of initiatives on development and human rights, encounter . . . problems emanating from a lack of commitment at the highest levels.”

Paragraph #197 of the Beijing Platform for Action

*As you come together in your circle, take time to consider the following, giving time to listen with mind and heart. . .*

### **Did you know?**

*In June of 2005, the Anglican Consultative Council meeting in Nottingham, England (ACC-13) passed the following resolution. The Anglican Consultative Council:*

- 1. Receives and adopts the Report of the ACC Provincial Delegation to the 49<sup>th</sup> UN Commission on the Status of Women and affirms the work of the International Anglican Women’s Network in responding to the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals ( MDG’s), thereby carrying forward the full flourishing of God’s creation.*
- 2. Acknowledges the MDG goal for equal representation of women in decision making at all levels, and so requests:*
  - a. The Standing Committee to identify ways in which this goal may appropriately be adapted for incorporation into the structures of the Instruments of Unity, and other bodies to which the Anglican Consultative Council nominates or appoints;*
  - b. All member churches to work towards the realization of this goal in their own structures of governance, and in other bodies to which they nominate or appoint;*
  - c. And to report progress to ACC-14*
- 3. Recommends that a study of the place and role of women in the structures of the Anglican Communion be undertaken by the Standing Committee in line with the object of the ACC to “keep in review the needs that may arise for further study, and, where necessary, to promote inquiry and research”;*
- 4. Requests that each Province give consideration to the establishment of a women’s desk for that Province;*
- 5. Thanks those Provinces which sent participants to the 49<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNCSW, and encourages those who did not to review their decision in time for the 50<sup>th</sup> Session in 2006 in solidarity with all women of the Anglican Communion.*

One thing that women have learned in attending the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women gathering each year is that statistics and other kinds of data gathering

are critical to advancing progress. Unfortunately they have also learned that access to that data is sometimes difficult and that, while some statistics have been compiled in recent decades, in some areas, we have no data. The Anglican Consultative Council's delegation of women has discovered that the Communion is among those who have no specific data on women.

It is a hopeful sign that in the resolution mentioned above, there is intent to study, and to "promote inquiry and research," so we will actually have some idea about the numbers of women who are part of our churches around the global Anglican Communion, what roles they play, how the church is empowering or might empower them, and perhaps more importantly, how they are empowering the church.

While we know that as women we are more than "numbers," we also know that without those numbers our progress will be limited. Combining those numbers with stories of real women, however, along with the universal language of the United Nations, is one way for us to move forward. When we combine all that with the language of our faith, we are bound, in new ways, in the true God of love, compassion and justice.

The Beijing Platform for Action reminds us that we must continue to develop ways to gather data and to monitor progress. Having offices to monitor the numbers is a step. It is also important that we ensure those offices are effective in reporting. Assuming the responsibility to continually ask questions about whether our systems and institutions are effective on our behalf is a necessary commitment.

What numbers or data about women in your community are easily available to you? How many women hold leadership positions in your local congregation? In your diocese? When you begin to move beyond numbers, what are the stories about those women, or others that are important to be told or to be remembered? Does your state have any offices that collect data on women or who advocate on behalf of women? Do you have a "Women's Hall of Fame" in your state? Have women's issues come before your diocesan convention? Your state legislature?

Building a ground of commonality is important in advocating for change in any area. Numbers and offices and stories will help. Sharing our faith will help. And prayer and companionship in our circles will help.

## Reflection

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it we hear, each of us, in our native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs – in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” *Acts 2:1-11 – NRSV*

How glorious that the Holy Spirit came to all the believers that were gathered. As one commentary suggests,<sup>59</sup> “They were all together in one place . . . This same spirit of one God ‘appeared among them – on each of them’ as the distinguishing mark of a *people* belonging to God . . . The Spirit’s arrival is a noisy affair with special effects that draws an interested public ‘from every nation’ to the community in amazement.”

Phoebe Griswold shared these thoughts with the Anglican Communion delegation to the 50<sup>th</sup> UNCSW this year:

“Global culture and context is a huge gap for us as Anglican women. How do we understand each other from different cultures and learn to work together? This challenges us to find ways to stay connected and to understand our different issues. We are challenged to bring to the Anglican Communion our conviction that we as a family will stay together through these challenging times.”<sup>60</sup>

For those of us who have been baptized by water and the Holy Spirit, what language do we speak together? From that first Pentecost the Spirit has come to us, not simply to give us each an individual gift or gifts to use in private, but for the witness and strengthening of the community in its testimony to God. Can you hear the Spirit whisper under the statistics? Can you feel the Spirit nudge in the stories? Perhaps you could make notes about your common language with others in the circle.

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<sup>59</sup> The New Interpreter’s Bible, Volume X, Abingdon Press, Nashville, p 57.

<sup>60</sup> From Phoebe Griswold’s address to the UNCSW Forum at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York on March 4, 2006.

## **Action and Prayer**

Until the circle meets again. . .

What will you take into your prayers?

What will you do, formally or informally, to learn about the numbers available to you?

Are there collective actions for the circle to take – locally? Nationally? Internationally?

## **Lack of respect for and inadequate promotion and protection of the human rights of women . . .**

“Attending the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) was probably the most eye-opening experience of my life. The statement above is what I am working to correct. I had never heard of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) before UNCSW. I am discouraged to find our country in the company of Sudan, Iran, and Somalia in the area of women’s rights.”

Amy McLean  
2006 Episcopal Church Delegate to the UNCSW

*As you come together in your circle, take time to consider the following, giving time to listen with mind and heart...*

### **Did you know?**

***The Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is the most comprehensive international agreement on the basic human rights of women. Created in 1979, it is an important tool for all those who seek to end abuses of women and girls throughout the globe . . .***

***Because of the CEDAW Treaty, millions of girls are now receiving primary education who were previously denied access, measures have been taken against sex slavery, domestic violence and trafficking of women; women’s health care services have improved, saving lives during pregnancy and childbirth; and millions of women have secured loans or the right to own or inherit their property.<sup>61</sup>***

As of this writing, 182 countries around the world have ratified this treaty. While there is still much implementation to be done, when a country ratifies the treaty, it commits to addressing discrimination against women in many areas and many countries have used the universal language of this United Nations initiative as a framework in establishing change, new guidelines and laws that prohibit discrimination against women.

However, the United States is one of a few countries that has not ratified CEDAW. Some would maintain<sup>62</sup> that the “U.S. failure to ratify the treaty allows other countries to divert attention away from their neglect of women and undermines the powerful principle that human rights of women are universal across all cultures, nations and religions. Until the U.S. ratifies CEDAW, our country cannot credibly demand that others live up to their obligations under this treaty. Our failure to ratify puts us in the company of Sudan, Iran and Somalia; every other industrialized country has ratified the treaty.”

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<sup>61</sup> From the website [www.cedaw.org](http://www.cedaw.org), April 27, 2006.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.



Amy's daughter is four years old. Can we take it for granted that her rights will be protected when women in the U.S. earn \$.77 for every dollar men make? Will our interests and those of our daughters, granddaughters, our sisters and nieces really be represented in the legislative arena when 67 of 410 legislators are women in the House of Representatives and 14 of 100 are women in the Senate?

And of her spiritual nurturing? In the fall of 2005, among 16,523 Episcopal clergy, there were 4,607 women priests with 2,033 actively employed, 332 retired and 913 considered inactive because they are not working in organizations who contribute on their behalf to the Church Pension Fund. There are 1,329 women deacons. Of the church's 292 bishops, 12 are women.<sup>63</sup> While numbers may not tell the whole story, we do know that they give at least a glimpse into a lopsided testimony about the equality of women in the United States.

It would take 67 Senators to ratify the Treaty. As of this writing, ten states have endorsed U.S. ratification in their state legislatures: California, Hawaii, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, South Dakota and Vermont.<sup>64</sup>

In the United States, a country founded in 1776, now over 230 years old, women have had the right to vote only since 1920. While there were women who wrote and advocated for the right to vote very early in our nation's history, the Suffrage Movement gained momentum from the time of the first Women's Rights Convention in 1848 in Seneca Falls, NY. It took nearly another 80 years, along with marches, editorials, organizing and even hunger strikes before women gained the right to vote.

When we speak about human rights in the United States, when we suggest that other countries are not as sensitive to those rights as we are, what do we mean? What do our lawmakers and the leadership in our various circles mean by rights? And for whom?

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<sup>63</sup> "Toward Columbus: Women's ordination marks 30-year milestone Debate changed face of church," by Mary Frances Schjonberg Friday, April 21, 2006, Episcopal News Service.

<sup>64</sup> [www.cedaw.org](http://www.cedaw.org)

## Reflection

... for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

*Galatians 3:26-29 – NRSV*

From Paul's letter to the Galatians, we are reminded that divisions over rights and power, even to call oneself Christian, have existed throughout the centuries. This is the same Paul who teaches the early church about the Body of Christ, that is, that we who share in Christ, have become his body in the world. Each of us has a part in making that body whole, none better than another.

So it is in the passage above. We learn about baptism into Christ as a radical equalizer. All of us who share in that baptism are one. What does it mean to you to be one in Christ with others?

If we are Christ's body in the world, what does that mean when we think about human rights? In our day it is especially difficult to tease apart the interaction between social, political, economic and religious aspects of our culture. It is not for the church to instruct her people how to vote, but everything that we learn about our faith and share in community and communion with others, points us toward justice and compassion. Who we are as Christians provides a framework for how we live and work, how we encourage our leaders, how we make our choices, how we exercise our power.

Sometimes it is sad to think that we need to depend on the United Nations to remind us of the lack of respect for and the inadequate protection of the human rights of women. But the United Nations provides us with a universal language, and it is a language that is not inconsistent with our faith.

Amy McLean learned that in this wealthy country, one which speaks so often about rights, that the treaty on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women is one that still cannot be successfully ratified in this part of the world. In our church there are small groups of women who are beginning to form Circles, looking to contribute from their Christian context to the healing of the world.

Think about the foundations of your faith. Consider what kind of letter you, or your Circle would write to a group of young mothers meeting in another church in another part of the country. Like Amy they are concerned about their children's understanding of the lack of respect and protection of the human rights of women. What would you say to them in your letter?

Who are the women in your own community whose rights are not protected? Do all the women in your town, or your state, have access to health care and to shelter? Are they protected when they've been threatened with violence? Are women in your community paid at a comparable rate as men? Where are the widows? Are there things you can learn from women around the world? Someone might want to do some research on what

is happening in some of the countries where CEDAW has been ratified. What would you ask women there in a letter from your Circle?

What does radical equality in Christ mean to you? How have you experienced it? How have you offered it?

### **Action and Prayer**

Until the circle meets again. . .

What will you take into your prayers?

What will you do, formally or informally, to support the respect and protection of the human rights of women?

Are there collective actions for the circle to take – locally? Nationally? Internationally?

**Stereotyping of women and inequality in  
women's access to and participation in all communication systems,  
especially in the media. . .**

“This focus on the body in an unhealthy sense is punitive, not liberating, and diverts the energy of women away from the far more crucial issues of voice and vision. Only in affluent nations such as ours, can the self receive this type of focus. Where starvation is a real issue, this issue is nonexistent. I think women need to heal their imaginations, especially in this country, by changing their perspectives and widening their understanding of the needs of the world, instead of striving for a perfect ‘ideal self.’ Maybe that’s why self love has to be connected to love of neighbor and love of God.”

Hondi Brasco

Member of Anglican Women's Empowerment and ACC Delegate to the UNCSW

*As you come together in your circle, take time to consider the following, giving time to listen with mind and heart. . .*

**Did you know?**

***90% of all girls ages 3-11 have a Barbie doll, an early role model with a figure that is unattainable in real life.***

***69% of female television characters are thin, only 5% are overweight (Silverstein, Peterson, Perdue and Kelly, 1986)***

***The average person sees between 400 and 600 ads per day – that is 40 million to 50 million by the time s/he is 60 years old. One of every 11 commercials has a direct message about beauty (this isn't counting the indirect ones).***

***Richins (1991) found that exposure to idealized images lowered subjects' satisfaction with their own attractiveness. Stice and Shaw (1994) studied subjects' reactions to pictures of thin models in magazines. Their results indicated that exposure to the thin ideal produced depression, shame, guilt, body dissatisfaction, and stress. Stice, et al. (1994) found a direct relationship between media exposure and eating disorders symptoms.***

***Some key findings from the Kaiser Family Foundation Survey: Reflection of Girls in the Media. (For full document visit: [www.kff.org/content/archive/1260/gends.shtml](http://www.kff.org/content/archive/1260/gends.shtml)) A national survey of 1,200 children ages 10 to 17, made up of African American, Latino, Caucasian and other ethnic group identified children:***

- ***Seven out of ten girls said they wanted to look like a television character. Almost a third of the girls (31%) said that they had changed something about their appearance to be more like the TV character. Sixteen percent of girls said that they had dieted or exercised to look like a TV character.***

- *The children associated worrying about appearance and weight, crying, whining and weakness more with female than male TV characters. Playing sports, being a leader, wanting to be kissed or have sex was more associated with male characters. Girls and boys also reported that female TV characters were more likely than males to rely on someone else to solve their problems, whereas males tend to solve their own problems.*
- *A content analysis of 33 popular Nintendo and Sega Genesis video games revealed that there were no female characters in 41% of the games. Females were either absent, or they were cast in the role of victim. In 28% of the games females were portrayed as sex objects. Almost 80% of the games required violence or aggression as a part of the strategy. Almost half of the games included violence directed specifically against other people, 21% of the games depicted direct violence against women. Most of the game characters were Caucasian. (Dietz, 1998)*
- *Social learning theory, developed by Albert Bandura in 1963 posits that humans learn behavior by observing others. The act of watching TV is an observation process. TV demonstrates and models behaviors/attitudes that children acquire.<sup>65</sup>*

The Center for Media Literacy is devoted to helping children and adults understand how to analyze the thousands of media messages they receive.<sup>66</sup> They share Five Key Questions and Five Core Concepts freely with educators and non-profit agencies, along with a curriculum built around those questions and concepts. It might be helpful to keep these in mind as your circle considers the representation of women in the media.

#### Five Key Questions of Media Literacy

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently than me?
4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent?

#### Five Core Concepts

1. All media messages are ‘constructed.’
2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.
3. Different people experience the same media message differently.
4. Media have embedded values and points of view.
5. Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

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<sup>65</sup> All statistics are used with thanks, from the web site of about-face. Liz Dittrich, Ph.D. compiled all fact sheets and invites others to visit the site at [www.about-face.org](http://www.about-face.org)

<sup>66</sup> <http://www.medialit.org/>

## Reflection

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

*Genesis 1:26 – NRSV*

Hondi Brasco, who has worked faithfully over the last several years as a member of Anglican Women’s Empowerment, shares some reflections –

“I remember reading Elizabeth Johnson’s book *She Who Is* many years ago. One line has really stayed with me. She wrote: “women waking up to their own worth constitutes a revolution in the religious history of humankind.” Ever since my days in seminary I’ve been thinking about how women wake up to their own worth and how they identify those internal and external forces that diminish and devalue women. Ironically as women have gained power and made themselves heard, eating disorders have also been on the rise, as if the obsession with the female body, and the effort to control it and shape it into an ideal form were a sort of backlash against female empowerment. I realize that the reasons are many and quite complex, but it seems to me to be an internalized form of violence. Little girls as young as 8 will complain that they are “too fat” and start worrying about their bodies as already flawed. Why this self rejection? I’ve observed this pattern for many years, having run the Health and Wellness program at our high school. It’s a mentality that exists among many girls in this next generation, not all of course.

There is a letter quoted in the Devotional Guide that was used this year which sums up the problem. It is from **Children’s Letter’s To God**. “Dear God, are boys really better than girls? I mean, I know you are one, but try to be fair.” (Furlong, p. 93)

No one would be foolish enough to deny that women and girls are made in the image of God. But we need men and women to truly demonstrate and affirm that truth, so that little girls writing to God, might see in themselves *the imago dei* and the cultural attitudes and practices that devalue girls and women can be exposed. And finally we need to embody this theology so that the hearts, minds and bodies of girls and women can be healed.”

What would happen if, when you see yourself in the mirror for the first time each morning for a week, you were to say, “I am made in God’s image.”

One Torah commentary suggests that, “Every human being has an irreducible worth and dignity because every human is fashioned in the image of God. The Second Commandment (Exod. 20) forbids fashioning an image of God. We do not need one because every person represents the divine.”<sup>67</sup>

How we imagine things has very much to do with the ideas we have, the goals we aspire to, the dreams we long to make into realities. It informs the pictures we draw, the

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<sup>67</sup> Torah and Commentary, The Rabbinical Assembly, The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, Published by The Jewish Publication Society, 2001. p. 10, para. 27.

thoughts we record, the décor we create, the dinner we cook. It nudges us to new ways of doing our work, looking at the projects before us.

What would it be like to imagine media messages grounded in the knowledge that we are created in the image of God? Have you ever seen such messages in the media? If so, your circle might wish to see them if they are available on tape or DVD.

For fun, what kind of commercials might you create together or recreate to reflect our belief that we are created in God's image?

What are the idols that we or others have created that replace the image of God in us?

### **Action and Prayer**

Until the circle meets again. . .

What will you take into your prayers?

What will you do, formally or informally, to consider how women are portrayed in the media – images, language, roles?

Are there collective actions for the circle to take – locally? Nationally? Internationally?

## **Gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment. . .**

Women do not want to be mainstreamed into the polluted stream. We want to clean the stream and transform it into a fresh and flowing body. One that moves in a new direction- a world at peace, that respects human rights for all, renders economic justice and provides a sound and healthy environment.

Bella S. Abzug (1920-1998)

Bella Abzug, outspoken and tireless in her work for women and thus for all people, known for her hats and her tenacity, among so much else, was a co-founder of the Women's Environment and Development Organization, an international advocacy organization that seeks to increase the power of women worldwide as policymakers at all levels in governments, institutions and forums to achieve economic and social justice, a healthy and peaceful planet, and human rights for all.

*As you come together in your circle, take time to consider the following, giving time to listen with mind and heart. . .*

### **Did you know?**

***“Women’s survival, and that of their households and communities, depends on access to and control of natural resources – land, water, forests and plants. Every day women and girls walk long distances to bring water and fuel to their families. Women perform the majority of the world’s agricultural work, producing food for their families, as well as other goods that are sold in national and international markets. Over generations, women have developed in-depth knowledge of the uses and care of medicinal plants. Women have learned to manage these resources in order to preserve them for future generations. Yet, women’s access to and control of these resources is far from guaranteed.”<sup>68</sup>***

“Water is essential to all aspects of life, yet 99 percent of water on Earth is unsafe or unavailable to drink. About 1.2 billion people globally lack safe water to consume and 2.6 billion do not have access to adequate sanitation. There are also stark comparisons: Just one flush of a toilet in the West uses more water than most Africans have to perform an entire day’s washing, cleaning, cooking and drinking. . .”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> The opening paragraph from “Common Ground: Women’s Access to Natural Resources and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals,” published by the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), ©1993. ISBN:0-9746651-1-8.

<sup>69</sup> “Dying for a Drink of Clean Water,” by Jan Eliasson and Susan Blumenthal, published in the Washington Post September 20, 2005, page A23.  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/19/AR2005091901295.html>



“At least 2 million people, most of them children, die annually from water-borne diseases such as diarrhea, cholera, dysentery, typhoid, guinea worm and hepatitis as well as such illnesses as malaria and West Nile virus carried by mosquitoes that breed in stagnant water.

Many of the ten million child deaths that occurred last year were linked to unsafe water and lack of sanitation. Children can’t fight off infections if their bodies are weakened by water-borne diseases.

Over half of the hospital beds in the developing world are occupied by people suffering from preventable diseases caused by unsafe drinking water and inadequate sanitation.”<sup>70</sup>

For every mile a young girl or woman must walk for water, her chances of sexual assault are increased, along with the possibility of injuries from carrying the water. For every woman who tries to feed her family from a small garden, the lack of water means nutritional deprivation. For every woman who cares for a sick child, or for another family member, the lack of clean water can mean ongoing dehydration for the one who is ill, and the spread of disease for those who are not.

The Beijing Platform for Action urges that women be at the table to make decisions and to tell stories in order to inform decisions and policies regarding the use of natural resources.

We tend not to be surprised by the conditions in what we know as “developing” countries. But often we may not know about the ways in which people in our own country are dramatically affected by the ways in which our resources are managed.

In a report on the Pine Ridge Oglala Lakota (Sioux) Reservation, Stephanie M. Schwartz reports:

- Over 33% of the Reservation homes lack basic water and sewage systems as well as electricity.
- Many residents must carry (often contaminated) water from the local rivers daily for their personal needs.
- Many of the wells and much of the water and land on the Reservation is contaminated with pesticides and other poisons from farming, mining, open dumps, and commercial and governmental mining operations outside the Reservation. A further source of contamination is buried ordnance and hazardous materials from closed US military bombing ranges on the Reservation.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

- Scientific studies show that the High Plains/Oglala Aquifer which begins under the Pine Ridge Reservation is predicted to run dry within the next thirty years . . . due to commercial interest use and dryland farming in numerous states south of the Reservation. This critical North American underground water resource is not renewable at anything near the present consumption rate. Recent years of drought have accelerated the problem.
- Scientific studies show that much of the High Plains/Oglala Aquifer has been contaminated with farming pesticides and commercial, factory, mining and industrial contaminants in the States of South Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas.<sup>71</sup>

What are the environmental issues that affect women in your community or in your region of the country? Often those most affected by the pollutants in our air and water are those who, because of their socio-economic status, must live in areas less monitored and more likely to be contaminated.

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<sup>71</sup> Wambli Ho, Voice of the Eagles: Special Report, November 2002, "Hidden Away in the Land of Plenty," by Stephanie M. Schwartz, Correspondent and Editor.

## **Reflection**

We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin into everlasting life.

*Thanksgiving over the water during Baptism – Book of Common Prayer, p. 306*

In our context as Christian women, the very foundation of our faith rests in the promise and renewal of the water of baptism. New life. Hope. The images of water throughout scripture are powerful, connected with life – and sometimes with death.

And today? What are the water connections today? After nearly a decade and a half the Hubble space telescope is still sending back spectacular images. Have you seen them? There are exquisite images of our planet earth, called the “Blue Planet” because so much of it is made up of water. Sometimes we’ve heard it called the Big Blue Marble.

What would it look like if there were a death color on that image in every place there was no access to safe drinking water? Our beautiful earth might not look so beautiful – not so able to sustain life. Perhaps it would look like a shrinking ball, or one from which the air was escaping and it was caving in on itself. What kind of earth is that?

What if we could see the color of death where millions of people die each year from the lack of water and from water-borne diseases?

A death colored marble.

How can we best offer our gratitude to the God of Creation? What does it mean for us to be trusted with that creation as stewards, caretakers, midwives? How are the waters of baptism and the water of life itself connected?

## **Action and Prayer**

Until the circle meets again. . .

What will you take into your prayers?

What will you do, formally or informally, to learn about the care of the earth?

Are there collective actions for the circle to take – locally? Nationally? Internationally?

## **Persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl child . . .**

The girl-child is discriminated against from the earliest stages of life, through her childhood and into adulthood. In some areas of the world, men outnumber women by 5 in every 100. The reasons for this discrepancy include harmful attitudes and practices, such as female genital mutilation, son preference – which results in female infanticide and prenatal sex selection – early marriage . . . violence against women, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, discrimination against girls in food allocation, and other practices related to health and well-being. As a result, fewer girls than boys survive into adulthood.

Beijing Platform for Action, paragraph 259

*As you come together in your circle, take time to consider the following, giving time to listen with mind and heart. . .*

### **Did you know?**

***Of the more than 110 million children not in school, approximately 60% are girls.***

***By age 18, girls have received an average of 4.4 years less education than boys.***

***World-wide of the more than 130 million primary school age children not enrolled in school, nearly 60% are girls.***

***In some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, adolescent girls have HIV rates up to five times higher than adolescent boys.***

***Pregnancies and childbirth-related health problems take the lives of nearly 146,000 teenage girls each year.***

***At least one in three girls and women worldwide has been beaten or sexually abused in her lifetime.***

***An estimated 450 million adult women in developing countries are stunted, a direct result of malnutrition in early life.***

***Two million girls and women are subjected to female genital mutilation every year.***

***Child marriage affects millions of girls. In South Asia 48% of girls are married before 18, 42% in Africa, and 29% in Latin America. It is not uncommon for girls to be married by the age of 15 or younger. Child marriage increases the girl's risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and her chances for suffering from pregnancy-related complications, including obstetric fistula. It also decreases their access to education.***

***Girls face particular issues as refugees and displaced people including: sexual violence, forced marriage, forced impregnation, lack of access to education, increased risk of HIV/AIDS, and economic exploitation.***<sup>72</sup>

In the devotional booklet provided for the 50<sup>th</sup> session of the UNCSW, we read this story.

“Ah Ching is a little girl who lives in a village in China. Her parents are hard-working peasants. Ah Ching’s father likes the little girl but he wants to have a son. One night when Ah Ching was asleep, she suddenly felt a blanket being pulled over her and she could hardly breathe. She struggled and yelled, ‘Mama, Mama, help, help me!’ To her amazement, she found that the one who tried to suffocate her was her father! She cried and prayed that her father would let her go and she promised to be a good girl. . . . Ah Ching was so afraid that when dawn broke, she escaped from the farm house and went to seek refuge with her old grandma. . . . When Grandma heard the story, she was so sad that tears began to run down her wrinkled cheeks. The night came, and Grandma put Ah Ching to bed and comforted her. But at midnight, Grandma summoned all her strength and with her trembling hands suffocated Ah Ching with an old blanket. . . .<sup>73</sup>

The Beijing Platform for Action, along with other treaties of the United Nations, seeks to restore the equality of little girls, to guard the lives of little girls. It is almost inconceivable when we think about the cherub-like infants in our church nurseries, or remember our own daughters, or think about our nieces or our granddaughters, that anyone would feel compelled to kill them, to maim them, to keep them from opportunity.

The 51<sup>st</sup> gathering of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women has made this its theme for 2007. There is still work to be done.

Sadly, the girl-child still needs our protection.

How will you help?

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<sup>72</sup> From statistics developed by UNICEF and contributed to the Millennium Report and the Women’s Ministries web page at the Episcopal Church Center.

[www.episcopalchurch.org/32862\\_73626\\_ENG\\_Print.html](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/32862_73626_ENG_Print.html)

<sup>73</sup> Lan, Kwok Pui “God Weeps with our Pain,” in Pobee, Joh S. and Von Wartenberg-Potter, Barbel Eds. New Eyes for Reading: Biblical and Theological Reflections by Women from the Third World. Geneva, Switzerland: WCC, 1986, p. 90-91.

## Reflection

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.” So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. And there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?” But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

*Mark 5:21-43 – NRSV*

Jairus begged Jesus repeatedly.

Jairus, the leader, the man of means, powerless, stricken.

He begged Jesus repeatedly.

How precious his daughter was to him.

He believed that if Jesus would but touch her, she would be made well.

On the way to that precious little girl,

The woman with the hemorrhages reached for him, just touched his clothes.

She too was desperate, but without means.

Jesus called her “Daughter,” and made her whole again.

Jesus and Jairus.

The woman and the little girl.

Rich, poor, male, female,  
Jesus touched them all.

And now  
Who will be the body of Christ  
To all the little girls who so desperately need healing  
Who need protection and advocacy  
Whose fathers and mothers plead for them  
Who will be their hope and healing?

Do you have a story to share about a little girl in need?  
Or someone like Jairus who pleaded for a little girl?  
Perhaps the circle will pray together for all the little girls  
In all the stories, for their protectors, and their healing  
And for all the little girls who wait.

### **Action and Prayer**

Until the circle meets again. . .

What will you take into your prayers?

What will you do, formally or informally, to address discrimination against girls?

Are there collective actions for the circle to take – locally? Nationally? Internationally?

## **A FEW ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**



## **Beijing Platform for Action Resources**

### **A. Women and Poverty**

*Beijing +5 Fact Sheet on the Feminization of Poverty*

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/session/presskit/fs1.htm>

*Legal Momentum* - Background and information on U.S. welfare reform.

<http://www.legalmomentum.org/issues/wel/index.shtml>

*US online working group for Women's Economic Security and Justice*

<http://www.uswc.org/wgpoverty.html>

*UNIFEM: Women, Poverty & Economics* - UNIFEM program information, news, and resources on the feminization of poverty.

[http://www.unifem.org/gender\\_issues/women\\_poverty\\_economics/at\\_a\\_glance.php](http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_poverty_economics/at_a_glance.php)

### **B. Education and Training of Women**

*United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)* – Statistics on Girls & Education, Publications, and information on UNICEF's programs

<http://www.unicef.org/girlseducation/index.php>

*United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)* - UNESCO's Primary Education Program/ Girls page links to information on their program strategies, resources on girls & education, relevant international commitments, and other websites.

<http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php->

[URL\\_ID=30887&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=30887&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

### **C. Women and health**

*International Women's Health Coalition* - The IWHC is a leading global advocate for women's health and rights. The site provides overviews of each one of their issues from youth health to reproductive rights. The Global Advocacy section suggests ways to take action. A thorough online research library dealing with women's health issues is also available on this site.

<http://www.iwhc.org/>

*The Center for Health and Gender Equity* - a U.S. based NGO that tracks the effects of U.S. foreign policy on the health of women and girls around the world.

<http://www.genderhealth.org/Mission.php?TOPIC=ABT>

### **D. Violence against women**

*U.S. Department of Justice, Department of Violence Against Women* - Links to DOJ Publications on VAW, State-by-State Action, and the National Advisory Committee on VAW

<http://www.usdoj.gov/ovw/>

*National Organization for Women* – Violence against women news updates, resources, and fact sheets.

<http://www.noworg/issues/violence>

*End Violence Against Women Information and Resources* - Links to Research, Tools for Gender Based Violence Programs, and E-Newsletter. It focuses particularly on the intersection of violence against women and reproductive health.

<http://www.endvaw.org/>

### **E. Women and Armed Conflict**

*United Nations Resources on Women and Armed Conflict* - Links to all UN Documents and UN entities dealing with women and armed conflict.

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/asp/user/list.asp?ParentID=3005>

*Human Rights Watch* - Overview of Women and Armed Conflict

<http://www.hrw.org/women/conflict.html>

*Amnesty International USA Women in Armed Conflict Fact Sheet* - Includes links to multimedia first-hand accounts of women and armed conflict. Also provides links to Violence Against Women resources and tools.

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/stopviolence/factsheets/armedconflict.html>

### **F. Women and the economy**

*Association for Women's Rights in Development* – Women's Rights and Economic Change Program lists a series of primers pertaining to women's rights and economic justice in addition to articles and analytical papers from the fields of human rights and development.

<http://www.awid.org/wrec/>

*Women in the Economy* – Facts, policy analysis, and resources on women and U.S. economic policy.

<http://www.womenintheeconomy.org/>

*Institute for Women's Policy Research* – Research & policy analysis on U.S. women's employment and earnings.

[http://www.iwpr.org/Employment/Research\\_employment.htm](http://www.iwpr.org/Employment/Research_employment.htm)

## **G. Women in power and decision-making**

*United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)* - Progress Report (Beijing Review) on Critical Area G: Women in Power and Decision-Making

<http://www.un-instraw.org/en/images/stories/Beijing/womeninpoweranddecisionmaking.pdf>

*Emily's List* - A grassroots political organization that supports women running for elected office at the local, state, and national levels.

<http://www.emilyslist.org/index.html>

*Center for American Women and Politics* - 2006 Election Watch, Current and Historical Information on Women Officeholders and Candidates, State-by-State Statistics, and Statistics on the Gender Gap and Voting Patterns.

<http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/>

## **H. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women**

*United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW)*

Overview, Functions, Membership, Follow up to Beijing, Emerging Issues  
Mainstreaming Gender information. There are also links to the past 15 sessions including outcome documents, recommendations, panels, and reports.

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/>

*Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*

Text of the Convention, History, States Parties, and Country Reports

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/index.html>

## **I. Human rights of women**

*Human Rights Watch* - The Women's Rights page links to numerous HRW campaigns and focus issue pages. Women's human rights information is available by region or thematic topic. Sign up to receive their email news updates.

<http://www.hrw.org/women/>

*Amnesty International* - Stop Violence Against Women blog, resources (including multi-media) for combating women's human rights violations, News reports, Publications, Ways to get involved, Activist Toolkit, Historic Human Rights Dates

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/women/index.do>

## **J. Women and the Media**

*Girls, Women, & Media Project* - This initiative and network provides information on the ways the media represents and affects women and girls. It provides educational resources and sustains an action network.

<http://www.mediaandwomen.org/>

*Media Channel* - Women's Media Project provides a discussion board and resources on women's leadership in media outlets.

<http://www.wifp.org/index.html>

*Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press* - WIFP maintains a network of women working and/ or interested in the media, online monthly newsletter, and links to publics. The site also provides a comprehensive listing of women's media organizations.

<http://www.wifp.org/index.html>

### **K. Women and the environment**

*Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO)* - Join the WEDO Sustainable Development Listserv. The WEDO library includes sections on Natural Resources & Sustainable Development.

<http://www.wedo.org/programs.aspx?mode=development>

*UN Women Watch, Women & the Environment* - Directory of UN resources on women and the environment

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/asp/user/list.asp?ParentID=3011>

### **L. The girl-child**

*The Working Group on Girls* - A group of non-governmental organization members work to advocate on behalf of girl's rights. Their site includes statistics on the girl-child, membership information for the International Network for Girls, and the e-news letter *Action for Girls*.

<http://www.girlsrights.org/Default.php>

*UN Resources on the Girl Child*

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/asp/user/list.asp?ParentID=3012>

*UN Population Fund* – UNFPA overview of the population issues affecting girls and adolescents. Links to UNFPA program work in these areas.

<http://www.unfpa.org/gender/girls.htm>

## Beijing Platform for Action-Related Acts of Convention (1976-2003)

<http://www.episcopalarchives.org>

The Episcopal Archives is an invaluable resource in helping us know what The Episcopal Church has stated about issues that we face in our world. All resolutions, from 1976 on, are in digital form and can be searched and researched at the web site above. It is often useful to have these resolutions nearby to remind us (and those with whom we speak and work) that the church has spoken on these important issues in our day.

<a href="#"><u>2003-A025</u></a>	Recommend Funding for Resource Materials on Trafficking in Women and Children
<a href="#"><u>2003-A028</u></a>	Encourage Support for Women and Children in War-Torn Areas
<a href="#"><u>2003-D006</u></a>	Endorse UN Millennium Development Goals
<a href="#"><u>2003-D020</u></a>	Oppose Legal Systems Which Violate Human Rights
<a href="#"><u>2003-D034</u></a>	Condemn Sex Trafficking
<a href="#"><u>2003-D034</u></a>	Recommend Funding for Resource Materials on Trafficking in Women and Children
<a href="#"><u>2000-D033</u></a>	Urge Dioceses and Congregations to Contribute to International Development Programs and Support Micro-Credit Initiatives
<a href="#"><u>2000-A057</u></a>	Recognize Problem of and Support Efforts to Stop Trafficking of Women, Girls, and Boys
<a href="#"><u>1997-C017</u></a>	Support Asylum Rights of Women Fleeing Mutilation
<a href="#"><u>1997-A050</u></a>	Request Dioceses to Address the Effects of Welfare Reform
<a href="#"><u>1994-D009</u></a>	Reaffirm Family Planning and Control Global Population Growth
<a href="#"><u>1994-A055</u></a>	Urge Government Funding in Matters Affecting the Health of Women
<a href="#"><u>1994-A049</u></a>	Encourage Ministries That Respond to Violence Against Women
<a href="#"><u>1994-A003</u></a>	Affirm Programs, Behaviors and Attitudes to Address the HIV/AIDS Pandemic
<a href="#"><u>1991-D096</u></a>	Include Women and Children in HIV/AIDS Funding
<a href="#"><u>1991-D067</u></a>	Recognize and Report on the Pauperization of Women and Children

<a href="#"><u>1991-C027</u></a>	Support Funding for the Federal WIC Program
<a href="#"><u>1991-A091</u></a>	Support United Nations' Statement on Discrimination Against Women
<a href="#"><u>1988-D167</u></a>	Monitor and Advocate for Welfare Reform
<a href="#"><u>1988-A077</u></a>	Request the Presiding Bishop to Appoint a Committee on the Status of Women
<a href="#"><u>1988-A074</u></a>	Request a Balance of Men and Women on Appointed Church Bodies
<a href="#"><u>1985-D033</u></a>	Work for Increases in Federal Aid to Poor Women and Children
<a href="#"><u>1985-C023</u></a>	Eradicate Institutional Sexism and Pursue Affirmative Action
<a href="#"><u>1982-D078</u></a>	Support Affirmative Action Programs Within the Church
<a href="#"><u>1976-D029</u></a>	Promote Programs Concerning Discrimination Against Women in the Church
<a href="#"><u>1976-C066</u></a>	Consider Ways of Fostering Fair Employment Practices for Women in Ministry

## **Letter from BEIJING - May 2006**

Dear Friends of Women's Ministries:

I have recently returned from 9 days in China as part of an Episcopal Church Delegation exploring the Church and theological education in that country. Four of us from the Church Center, two theological professors, a representative from the Diocese of New York and several members of the Episcopal Asia Ministries (EAM) were part of our group. It was a rich time, gathering with church and government officials as well as a visit to Amity Press which ensures that Chinese Christians have Bibles and other materials available at low cost. In this note I want to share a "women's ministries" perspective of our journey, which I found to be enlightening, hopeful and full of questions.

I was particularly excited to go to Beijing, as that was the place of the international UN gathering in 1995 where the Beijing Platform for Action was written and on which the UNCSW work and the work of our own Anglican Women's Empowerment is grounded. The tenets of that secular document have been instrumental in setting benchmarks for the empowerment of women around the world and now, in our Anglican Communion. In Beijing as elsewhere, progress is being made.

In the Church in China, progress seems to have leapt forward. In every meeting, whether with church leaders in Shanghai, a theological seminary in Nanjing, or the official government department on Religious Affairs (SARA), women were prominently in the mix. In two of the three large churches we visited (membership hovering from 3000-7000) the senior ministers were women. At another seminary, the academic dean spoke of their work in feminist theology and suggested we remain in email contact. I can't wait!

I felt as if I had uncovered a great secret. Like many of you I had heard of the persecuted underground church in China. And I am sure that the picture is not as rosy as it was portrayed in formal gatherings of nine short days. Nevertheless, I understood the Chinese Church with its incredibly growing numbers in the process of claiming its own identity. The underlying egalitarianism of the politics of the past has made it possible for women to emerge as leaders. Noticing the consistent presence of women in our gatherings, the Rev. Fran Toy asked if this was intentional. "No," came the reply, "it is simply quite natural."

In the long and difficult journey of the church to maintain its presence within Communism and during the Cultural Revolution, it has becoming increasingly committed to claiming Chinese authenticity. While appreciative of the missionary efforts which brought Christianity to China, the work of the Church today is to find its own way. This may sometimes seem isolationist, but what it echoed for me were the years in which women needed to be apart in order to claim our own identity as separate from the male culture which had defined us for so long. Among the many principles of the post colonialist, post denominational Chinese church are those which include mutual respect, non interference and non subordination. I certainly remember those words in the years in

this country when women were struggling to claim a place in seminaries and as pastors of churches. The group spent one morning with Bishop H.K. Teng, originally ordained as an Anglican in the 1940's. His theology has shaped the current official church, perhaps more than any other. It is an inclusive theology, one that claims the Bible as its core, but is not afraid of difference---and the variety of religious expressions in Chinese culture and history. His theology places Christ at the center of the Cosmos, underscoring Christian responsibility for all creation. His book, *No Longer Strangers*, and other essays on his thought, *Seeking Truth in Love*, offer a way of looking at a post denominational culture which is relevant for our own struggles for church identity and unity among churches in the United States.

During our visit we met officials who reminded us that they were bringing the Bible to the United States. Actually they were inviting us to visit an exciting and historic exhibition: *The History of the Bible in China*, a two month long exhibition sponsored by the China Christian Council and the American Bible Society which began at the Crystal Cathedral, is being shown in Atlanta in May and at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in June. I look forward to visiting the exhibition and connecting again with some of the women we met. The Rev. Cao Shngjie, president of the China Christian Council will be at our General Convention in June and will greet our Deputies and Bishops and the ECW. She is a powerful symbol for church leadership for us all.

This long letter is the good news. I harbor no illusions that it is all a pretty picture. And those who have more experience in China than I have documented human rights issues which are ongoing. A recent front page Times photo of the Politburo (eight men around the table) was a clear reminder that equal participation by women is not a reality in governments around the world, including our own. We still have a long way to go.

As we look toward General Convention, I note there are a number of resolutions of particular interest to women. Marge Christie, deputy from Newark and Helena Mbele Mbong of the Convocation of Churches in Europe are submitting a resolution to affirm Resolution 13/31 passed by the Anglican Consultative Council in Nottingham, England in June of 2005. In addition to encouraging the establishment of women's desks in every Province of our Communion and surveying the place and role of women, the resolution calls for equal participation of women in all decision making bodies. What a rich Communion we would be if all God's people were equally represented! We have much to learn and far to go of course, but as we seek to be faithful to our call as disciples of Jesus we rest in the assurance that God's realm promises abundant life for all. May it be so!

Faithfully,  
Margaret Rose



## **Statement from the Anglican Consultative Council delegates' gathering at the 48th Session of the United Nations Commission on the status of women**

ACNS 3801

Tuesday, March 16, 2004



[Anglican Communion News Service ] The Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) delegation to the 48th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) meeting in New York, 1-12 March, 2004 examined two themes from the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, "Men and boys in gender equity" and "Women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management, resolution and post-conflict peace building." The delegation comprising members from 11 provinces claimed the Anglican Communion as an unbreakable bond. The 55 Anglican delegates experienced communion as the reality of women working together for justice and peace in the name and power of Jesus Christ. Women rejoice in God's gift of the Anglican Communion and claim their call to strengthen that Communion.

We are convinced that women hold society together during times of natural disaster, illness and war. Women's experience of holding, healing and sustaining families and communities will not be relegated to the private sphere but will become a public voice heard and acted on in places of power and decision making in the Church and around the world. Just as the United Nations calls for women's presence in all processes of conflict resolution and peace building, so should the Church seek women's participation at every level.

We were proud to participate under the auspices of the Anglican Observer to the United Nations and are privileged to carry forth the work of the ACC and its commitment to preventing and eradicating HIV/AIDS (Resolution 2 of ACC 12). The ACC delegation hosted a public forum on "The Cross-Generational Spread of HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa and its Effect on Girls", recognizing the feminization of the disease in the faces of the young girl, the wife and the widow.

Therefore:

We call on the Anglican Consultative Council to continue its affirmation of the International Anglican Women's Network and we challenge the ACC to adopt the goal of a 30% representation of women in all decision-making bodies in our Anglican Communion.

We commit ourselves to communicating with women at the grass roots level, the empowering learning of this gathering established in the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). We embrace and work to implement those goals particularly 3) "Promote Gender Equality and empower women." We deplore all forms of violence against women, and commit ourselves to expose and correct these violations of human rights: war, sexual abuse, poverty and trafficking. We invite boys and men to join us in this critical work.

We commend those provinces who sent delegates to the 48th Session and challenge all 38 provinces to send delegates to the 49th Session of the CSW meeting in March of 2005, where we will join with women of faith to be an even stronger voice for women's empowerment.

We affirm our love and passion for the work of Jesus Christ and invite our sisters and brothers to a life of mission in Jesus' name. "Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine" Ephesians 3:20

12 March 2004

## **Statement from the Anglican Consultative Council delegates' gathering at the 49th Session of the United Nations Commission on the status of women**

Closing Statement -2005

The unity of the Anglican Communion was positively demonstrated when 41 women from 27 provinces gathered as the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) delegation to the 49th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) meeting in New York February 28-March 11, 2005. With others we examined the theme from the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) to review the implementation of the BPfA and the outcome documents of the special session of the General Assembly entitled 'Women 2000: Gender equality, development and peace for the 21st century'.

As we came together to listen to each other in honesty and trust, we developed a greater understanding of the body of Christ, recognizing the hurt and pain, hopes and joys of women and children across the Communion, and with one voice we endorsed the reaffirmation of the BPfA.

During our two weeks of meetings we reflected on the 12 planks of the BPfA based on a questionnaire circulated in advance. In small group discussions and regional caucuses, delegates were able to identify the most pressing women's concerns. The delegation highlighted 4 areas of major importance which impede world-wide development: poverty, poor education, violence and lack of access to good, affordable healthcare. These areas were the basis for consultations, which enabled delegates to discern God's call for their personal commitment and action as part of the Church's participation in God's mission for the world.

While acknowledging the strides many governments have taken to implement the BPfA, this delegation calls strongly for continued action with increased resources both human and financial, to ensure concrete results through programs of education and legislation.

We call on the ACC to affirm the advancements our governments have made regarding the status of women and encourage them to continue in this work. We strongly recommend the ACC continues to affirm the International Anglican Women's Network (IAWN) and again call on the ACC to adopt the goal of 30% representation of women in decision making bodies at all levels in our Anglican Communion. We call on the ACC to aim for 50% representation by the year 2010, to reflect more justly the current makeup of our Anglican global communion.

This year 27 provinces responded to the challenge to be represented at the UNCSW. We are grateful to everyone who has made it possible to finance and give their time to this venture. We ask the ACC to encourage those unrepresented this year to demonstrate their solidarity with the women of the Anglican Communion by sending delegates to the next, 50th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

We look forward to a time when the Anglican Communion, as part of the body of Christ, brings women's and men's voices into balance and so reflect the true and inclusive nature of God.

**ACC Gender Equality Resolution 13/31  
at ACC-13 meeting in Nottingham**

The ACC Provincial Delegation to the 49th UN Commission on the Status of Women  
(*Passed Resolutions of the ACC-13 page 8*)

The Anglican Consultative Council:

1. Receives and adopts the Report of the ACC Provincial Delegation to the 49th UN Commission on the Status of Women and affirms the work of the International Anglican Women's Network in responding to the Beijing Platform for Action and the MDGs, thereby carrying forward the full flourishing of God's creation
2. Acknowledges the MDG goal for equal representation of women in decision making at all levels, and so requests:
  - a. The Standing Committee to identify ways in which this goal may appropriately be adapted for incorporation into the structures of the Instruments of Unity, and other bodies to which the Anglican Consultative Council nominates or appoints;
  - b. All member churches to work towards the realization of this goal in their own structures of governance, and in other bodies to which they nominate or appoint;
  - c. and to report progress to ACC-14.
3. Recommends that a study of the place and role of women in the structures of the Anglican Communion be undertaken by the Standing Committee in line with the object of the ACC to "keep in review the needs that may arise for further study, and, where necessary, to promote inquiry and research";
4. Requests that each Province give consideration to the establishment of a women's desk for that Province;
5. Thanks those Provinces which sent participants to the 49th Session of UNCSW, and encourages those who did not to review their decision in time for the 50th Session in 2006 in solidarity with all women of the Anglican Communion.

## **Closing Statement of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) Delegation to the 50th Session of the UNCSW (2006)**

Greetings from ACC Delegates to the 50th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW). We would like to acknowledge the great advances and achievements over the last year especially the unanimous approval of ACC Resolution 13-31 by the Anglican Consultative Council in Nottingham. We congratulate and thank the Primates for sending delegates from virtually every Province enabling us to have this edifying, enriching, supportive and positive experience. We have celebrated our common mission and found ways to empower each other in furthering God's Kingdom.

Together we engaged the themes of the 50th Session of the UNCSW:

- *Enhanced participation of women in development: an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the fields of health, education and work.*
- *Equal participation of women and men in decision making processes at all levels.*

At the United Nations we attended plenary and high level roundtable discussions, and participated in caucuses, regional meetings and parallel events through which we contributed to the work and outcomes of the UNCSW. Many delegates met their official government representatives to the UN.

Our attendance has opened our eyes to new avenues for the empowerment of women and will enhance our participation in the Church and in our communities; and encourage us to implement, in a very effective way, the mission of ACC. Our attendance as women of faith has also brought the transformative power of Jesus Christ to the CSW meeting.

The following themes were identified from our collective work:

- Spiritual, mental and physical health.
- Economic development to defeat poverty.
- Education.
- Countering violence with peace.

Our discussions on these themes will be detailed in the UN Observer's Report to the ACC Standing Committee.

We would like to highlight the importance of the Office of the Anglican Observer to the United Nations as a resource for women's mission.

We respectfully call on the ACC Standing Committee to:

- Ensure a proper reporting mechanism is established for the purposes of accountability of Provinces on the implementation of ACC 13-31.
- Reconsider ACC Resolution to include all Primates in ACC Standing Committee because it contradicts ACC 13-31 for equal representation of women and men at all levels of decision making.
- Recognize and support the International Anglican Women's Network and its new structures, which the delegates to this Session have affirmed.
- Promote equal participation and leadership of women and men through strategies and programs at all levels of the Church.
- Encourage Provinces to affirm the advancements that some governments have made

regarding the status of women and to charge all governments to do more.

We know that the work we have done as the largest NGO at the 50th UNCSW has been important. We look forward to building upon this work with strong representation at the 51st UNCSW.

Our time together as women has proved that the things that unite us in the Communion are greater and mightier than those that divide us.

New York, March 7th, 2006

## **A Statement to the Executive Council from the Episcopal Church Delegation**

*In joy and gratitude we bring you good news from The Episcopal Church  
Delegates to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women*

### Introduction

The 50th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) held from February 27 to March 10 of 2006 brought several thousand women from around the globe to address the challenges that face women and their families as we move into the 21st century. The 148 women who represented the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) were the largest Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) to this UN event. The Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals were the underpinnings of this year's emphasis on creating an "enabling environment for achieving gender equality in the fields of education, health and work" and to achieve the "equal participation of women in decision making processes at all levels."

We are proud of the collaborative efforts of the entire ACC delegation, represented in separate groups while at the same time demonstrating sincere bonds of affection for one another. All 38 Provinces of the Anglican Communion were represented by 68 delegates; there were two from every Province in The Episcopal Church, 20 from the Anglican Women's Empowerment group (the planning team), seven under the age of 35 and another 35 participants in a specially planned weekend immersion into the intricacies and agenda of the UNCSW.

### Accomplishments

As a result of efforts last year, this year's delegation included women from Taiwan, the Dominican Republic and the American Churches in Europe.

- Several delegates traveled to Israel to join the Palestinian woman they met last year in order to see first hand the conditions described and to begin a personal testimony to the terrible conditions under which Palestinians live behind the Wall. A Christian Peace Pilgrimage is planned for 2007.
- The Office of Anglican & Global Relations designated the DVD of last year's experience – "Shall We Gather: Anglican Women Together" – for World Mission Sunday on February 26, and the generous grant from the Constable Fund enabled the distribution of the DVD to every Episcopal congregation, every ACC delegate to UNCSW this year and to everyone who attended the event we sponsored at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine.
- Delegates recommitted themselves to working to bring the planks of the Beijing Platform for Action into reality, not only by working within their own congregations and dioceses to address specific issues, but also by using a theological reflection resource still under development by the Office for Women's Ministries which will raise both local and global awareness of women's realities and the need to recommit to action.

### Communion

Arenas for education, dialogue and decision making were created around the UN Plenary sessions, side event presentations and discussion groups, social events, joint and separate meetings of Provincial and Episcopal delegates and informal sharing of experiences and life in our varied "global villages." These connecting relationships serve as threads of the peace, reconciliation and action to which Jesus calls us, binding together through love the repair of a broken world.

Episcopal Church delegates were catalysts for political activism on many issues of immense importance, including the desperate status of women in many parts of the world such as the Sudan, Palestine/Israel, Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as closer to home in South Florida. The United

States NGO Caucus was led by Episcopal delegates, which produced a statement presented to the US Mission (see attached). One major concern was the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) by the United States Congress. This and other items, were brought before the United States Mission to the United Nations (see attached). Episcopalians also chaired the caucus on Women and Development, and by sharing their recommendations with government delegations, the caucus was able to contribute to the shape of the Outcome Document.

#### New awareness

- Violence against women has increased world-wide.
- Millions of dollars are being made from the trafficking of women, girls and boys.
- Parity between women and men in elected office and in representation at the UN offices is losing ground.
- Access to physical, mental and reproductive health care world-wide is minimal.
- Economic gaps between rich and poor nations, and even within the US, have widened to near crisis proportions.
- Women need to be supported and encouraged to run for political office.

#### Call to action

We call on the Executive Council to join us in achieving the following:

- equal participation at all levels of decision-making. The House of Deputies in 2006 is close to parity (46.3%), but in most other national church bodies that is not the case. Resolution 13/31 was passed by the ACC last June calling on all "member churches" to work for parity; we ask the Executive Council to begin that work in our Province. (see attached)
- the use of the Beijing Platform for Action with companion diocese relationships and investment and mission strategies.
- active and ongoing condemnation of violence against women as part of the curriculum for training for ministry.
- addressing the discrepancy in salaries between ordained women and men which is a justice issue.

Our attendance at the 50th UNCSW meeting has taught us that, although there are significant gender issues in our own country and women who need our ministry, our opportunities, freedoms and security are great. We have felt the call at this gathering to use the resources that have been given us to help our sisters around the world. New mission and ministry projects have been conceived here.

We leave with more to pray for, more work to do and more people to love. We thank God for the ways we have been changed and challenged by this meeting.

## **Joint Statement of the Provincial Girl Delegates at the UNCSW to the Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council**

UNHQ, New York, 23 February – 4 March 2007

### Introduction

We are a group of girl delegates aged 13 to 18 from around the world, including the United States, Australia, Hong Kong, India and Kenya who have been invited to participate in UNCSW51. It is a pity that we did not get the chance to meet our sister from Burundi due to her visa problem. We have been exposed to a lot of issues that concern the girl child and have been introduced to many of our fellow girl delegates. This is the first time ever in history that people under the age of 18 participated in any of the United Nations meetings. It is also the first time ever that the ECOSOC Chambers was opened for the discussion of women's issues.

### Issues that concern the Girl Child

In studying "all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child", we learnt about:

- child trafficking which is often connected to sexual exploitation, prostitution and pornography;
- gender inequality in education and job opportunity;
- that more than 60% of 15 to 25 year-olds living with HIV/Aids are female;
- that girls suffer from violence in regions of armed conflict; and
- that the media portrays a gender bias that undermines girls' and women's' empowerment.

### Key-learning and Enlightenment

Apart from making new friends from different countries, the participation has very much widened our perspectives. Our key-learning throughout these two weeks include (1) that *education* liberates women for them to understand their rights in regard to their *bodies* (dispensing Female Genital Mutilation), their *voices* (the right to speak out and be heard) and their *opportunities* (in education and career and *decision-making*) and (2) that *poverty* and lack of *knowledge* go hand in hand with each other and often they form a vicious cycle. We also see that together, we can make a difference and build a better world together.

### Suggestions on the Church's response from the girls' perspective

We thank the Church and our chaperones for bringing us here together and their hospitality throughout. We are aware that the church lives in the community even at the village level. We believe that the church has the power to raise every community's awareness to the women's status by (i) providing networking and mentoring to girls, (ii) advocating and promoting the 13/31 Resolution, (iii) educating girls as well as boys on equal gender rights, and (iv) continuing to work with deprived women and children. While being touched ourselves, we wish that the Church may continue to touch the lives of the unfortunate ones in the world. We pray that with God's own pastoral love and His own healing hands, people everywhere will be filled with the strength, peace and joy in their life and have the power and courage to face whatever challenges that are encountered in fighting for equality, peace and justice, without doubt or fear.



## **From the Anglican Women gathered at the 51st of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women**

3 March 2007

In the name of God, Saviour, Redeemer, and Giver of Life.

We, the women of the Anglican Communion gathered in New York as the Anglican Consultative Council delegation to the 51st Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, and as members of the International Anglican Women's Network representing the diversity of women drawn from across the world wide Anglican Communion, wish to reiterate our previously stated unequivocal commitment to remaining always in "communion" with and for one another.

We remain resolute in our solidarity with one another in our commitment, above all else, to pursue and fulfill God's mission in all we say and do.

Given the global tensions so evident in our Church today, we do not accept that there is any one issue of difference or contention which can, or indeed would ever cause us to break our unity as represented by our common baptism. Neither would we ever consider severing the deep abiding bonds of affection which characterize our relationships as Anglican women.

We have been challenged in our time together by the desperately urgent issues of life and death faced by countless numbers of women and children in our communities. As a diverse delegation, we prayerfully reflected on these needs.

We thus reaffirm the conclusion of the statement presented by our delegation to this year's session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women:

*This sisterhood of suffering is at the heart of our theology and  
our commitment to transforming the whole world through peace  
with justice. Rebuilding and reconciling the world is central to our faith.  
Amen*

## **PROVINCES OF THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION<sup>74</sup>**

The Anglican Episcopal family consists of an estimated 80 million Christians who are members of 44 different churches. These make up 34 provinces, 4 United Churches, and 6 other churches, spread across the globe.

**The Anglican Church of Australia**

**The Church of Bangladesh**

**Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil**

**The Anglican Church of Burundi**

**The Anglican Church of Canada**

**The Church of the Province of Central Africa**

**Iglesia Anglicana de la Region Central de America**

**Province de L'Eglise Anglicane Du Congo Congo**

**The Church of England**

**Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui**

**The Church of the Province of the Indian Ocean**

**The Church of Ireland**

**The Nippon Sei Ko Kai (The Anglican Communion in Japan)**

**The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem & The Middle East Middle East**

**The Anglican Church of Kenya**

**The Anglican Church of Korea**

**The Church of the Province of Melanesia**

**La Iglesia Anglicana de Mexico**

**The Church of the Province of Myanmar (Burma)**

**The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)**

**The Church of North India (United)**

**The Church of Pakistan (United)**

**The Anglican Church of Papua New Guinea**

**The Episcopal Church in the Philippines**

**L'Eglise Episcopal au Rwanda**

**The Scottish Episcopal Church**

**Church of the Province of South East Asia**

**The Church of South India (United)**

**Anglican Church of Southern Africa**

**Iglesia Anglicana del Cono Sur de America**

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<sup>74</sup> [www.anglicancommunion.org](http://www.anglicancommunion.org)

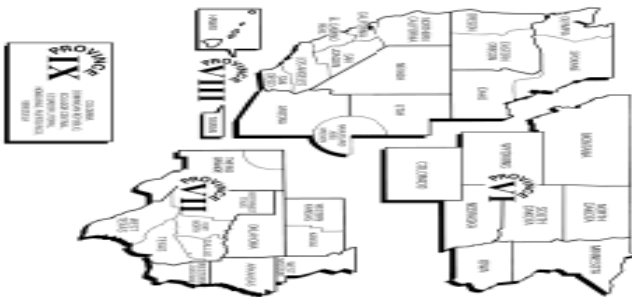
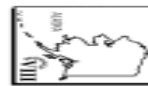
**The Episcopal Church of the Sudan**  
**The Anglican Church of Tanzania**  
**The Church of the Province of Uganda**  
**The Episcopal Church in the USA**  
**The Church in Wales**  
**The Church of the Province of West Africa**  
**The Church in the Province of the West Indies**  
**The Church of Ceylon (E-P to the Archbishop of Canterbury)**  
**Iglesia Episcopal de Cuba**  
**Bermuda (Extra-Provincial to Canterbury)**  
**The Lusitanian Church (E-P to the Archbishop of Canterbury)**  
**The Reformed Episcopal Church of Spain (E-P to the Archbishop of Canterbury)**  
**Falkland Islands (Extra-Provincial to Canterbury)**

# Provinces

of the

## Episcopal Church

2007-2009 Triennium



**Head Office:**  
 BISHOP'S OFFICE  
 100 WEST STREET  
 ALBANY, NY 12202

**The Diocese of Albany is a member of the**  
 General Convention of the  
 Episcopal Church in the  
 United States of America  
 1979-1982  
 1988-1992  
 1997-2000

**The Bishop of Albany is a member**  
 of the General Convention of the  
 Episcopal Church in the  
 United States of America

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**PROVINCES OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
(along with the location of Diocesan Offices)**

**PROVINCE I**

**Connecticut (Hartford)  
Maine (Portland)  
Massachusetts (Boston)  
New Hampshire (Concord)  
Rhode Island (Providence)  
Vermont (Burlington)  
Western Massachusetts (Springfield)**

**PROVINCE II**

**Albany (Albany, New York)  
Central New York (Syracuse)  
Convocation of American Churches in Europe (Paris)  
Haiti (Port-au-Prince)  
Long Island (Garden City)  
New Jersey (Trenton)  
New York (New York City)  
Newark (Newark, New Jersey)  
Rochester (Rochester, New York)  
Virgin Islands  
Western New York (Buffalo)**

**PROVINCE III**

**Bethlehem (Bethlehem, Pennsylvania)  
Central Pennsylvania (Harrisburg)  
Delaware (Wilmington)  
Easton (Easton, Maryland)  
Maryland (Baltimore)  
Northwestern Pennsylvania (Erie)  
Pennsylvania (Philadelphia)  
Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)  
Southern Virginia (Norfolk)  
Southwestern Virginia (Roanoke)  
Virginia (Offices in Richmond; Cathedral shrine in Orkney Springs)  
Washington (Washington, DC)  
West Virginia (Charleston)**

**PROVINCE IV**

**Alabama (Birmingham)  
Atlanta (Atlanta, Georgia)  
Central Florida (Orlando)  
Central Gulf Coast (Offices in Pensacola, Florida; Cathedral in Mobile, Alabama)  
East Carolina (Kinston, North Carolina)  
East Tennessee (Knoxville)  
Florida (Jacksonville)**

**Georgia (Savannah)**  
**Kentucky (Louisville)**  
**Lexington (Lexington, Kentucky)**  
**Louisiana (New Orleans)**  
**Mississippi (Jackson)**  
**North Carolina (Raleigh)**  
**South Carolina (Charleston)**  
**Southeast Florida (Miami)**  
**Southwest Florida (Offices in Sarasota; Cathedral in St. Petersburg)**  
**Tennessee (Nashville)**  
**Upper South Carolina (Columbia)**  
**West Tennessee (Memphis)**  
**Western North Carolina (Asheville)**

**PROVINCE V**

**Chicago (Chicago, Illinois)**  
**Eau Claire (Eau Claire, Wisconsin)**  
**Eastern Michigan (Saginaw)**  
**Fond du Lac (Fond du Lac, Wisconsin)**  
**Indianapolis (Indianapolis, Indiana)**  
**Michigan (Detroit)**  
**Milwaukee (Milwaukee, Wisconsin)**  
**Missouri (St. Louis)**  
**Northern Indiana (South Bend)**  
**Northern Michigan (Marquette)**  
**Ohio (Cleveland)**  
**Quincy (Peoria, Illinois)**  
**Southern Ohio (Cincinnati)**  
**Springfield (Springfield, Illinois)**  
**Western Michigan (Portage/Kalamazoo)**

**PROVINCE VI**

**Colorado (Denver)**  
**Iowa (Offices in Des Moines; Cathedrals in Davenport and Des Moines)**  
**Minnesota (Minneapolis; Cathedrals in Minneapolis and Faribault)**  
**Montana (Helena)**  
**Nebraska (Omaha)**  
**North Dakota (Fargo)**  
**South Dakota (Sioux Falls)**  
**Wyoming (Laramie)**

**PROVINCE VII**

**Arkansas (Little Rock)**  
**Dallas (Dallas, Texas)**  
**Fort Worth (Offices in Fort Worth, Texas; Cathedral in Bedford)**  
**Kansas (Topeka)**  
**Northwest Texas (Lubbock)**  
**Oklahoma (Oklahoma City)**

**Rio Grande (Albuquerque)**  
**Texas (Houston)**  
**West Missouri (Kansas City)**  
**West Texas (San Antonio)**  
**Western Kansas (Salina)**  
**Western Louisiana (Shreveport)**

**PROVINCE VIII**

**Alaska (Fairbanks)**  
**Arizona (Phoenix)**  
**California (San Francisco)**  
**Eastern Oregon (The Dalles)**  
**El Camino Real (San Jose, California)**  
**Hawaii (Honolulu)**  
**Idaho (Boise)**  
**Los Angeles (Los Angeles, California)**  
**Navajoland Area Mission**  
**Nevada (Las Vegas)**  
**Northern California (Sacramento)**  
**Olympia (Seattle)**  
**Oregon (Portland)**  
**San Diego (San Diego, California)**  
**San Joaquin (Fresno, California)**  
**Spokane (Spokane, Washington)**  
**Taiwan (Taipei)**  
**Utah (Salt Lake City)**

**PROVINCE IX**

**Colombia (Bogotá)**  
**Dominican Republic**  
**Central Ecuador**  
**Littoral Ecuador**  
**Honduras (San Pedro Sula)**  
**Puerto Rico**  
**Venezuela (Caracas)**

## ONLINE CIRCLES

*Jennifer Wolcott was first a delegate to the UNCSW in 2007. She was also part of our first “experimental” online circle. Jennifer has shared her words of wisdom (along with input from all her sisters in the circle) for those who are interested in connecting online.*

When you are geographically far from each other, or you have the kinds of schedules that don't permit easy get-togethers, an online format for a Beijing Circle is an option. All of the factors involved in creating and participating in a face-to-face circle go into an online Beijing Circle. Only the medium is different. The purpose of the online circle is still to bring a group together in the spirit of prayer, to focus attention on the Beijing Platform for Action and women's aspects of the Millennium Development Goals and, where feasible, to encourage proactive responses to women's issues deriving from those initiatives. The same format can, of course, be used for any number of other purposes. Sacred circles have been a part of our lives since the earliest days of womanhood and will continue to enrich our lives in the future.

Online Beijing Circles are a wonderful tool for bridging distance and time. Like other online social networking tools, amazing connections can be made that would otherwise be impossible. That being said, Beijing Circles begin with the idea of intimacy—the idea that the members of a circle are (usually) already members of a shared faith community. That means that their interest in each other goes well beyond the specific topic focus of their circle—support and interest in personal things like children, health, schools, church issues, and so on. Members may frequently meet outside of the circle, and share other activities that deepen the bonds between them. In-person Beijing Circles also provide certain things that online circles cannot directly support—hugs and eye contact being the most important. In emotional moments, a traditional Beijing Circle might include hugs and other non-verbal forms of support during highly emotional moments. In the same vein, because an online circle is limited to verbal and perhaps video communication, there is a tendency to focus more on the intellectual side and less on the emotional. At the same time, conceptual and informational communication can be much more considered, and therefore sharper.

In creating an online circle think about what happens in a face-to-face circle. People are actually sitting in the form of circle. An ambience is set up—comfortable seating, scented candles, perhaps some warm tea. There are greetings and a lot of friendly chitchat. The Convener brings everyone's attention to the center, and provides the focus for the circle's discussion. Many face-to-face circles will start with a ritual element—perhaps the lighting of a candle or the ringing of a bell—and a prayer. Each of these things is intended to take the faith group into a sacred space. During the discussion, many things will happen including, of course, discussions on point, but also little personal notes, small groups getting off topic or diving into a topic, or occasional tears with the circle comforting that person. There might be a break, some cake or other food might be served, and people will leave to refill their glasses or to visit the facilities; nevertheless, the concept of intimate space is maintained for the duration of circle. At the end of the time allotted, the Convener brings the session to a close conceptually, followed perhaps by a



final prayer and the blowing out of the candle. And even then the circle is not completely over—there are the goodbyes, accompanied by some people carrying things out to the kitchen and helping with the cleanup. And of course, there is individual sharing (keeping confidentiality in mind) of their experience with those at home or with other friends, and the follow-up calls the next day.

All these things ‘complete’ the Beijing Circle. The online Conveners need to find ways, if possible, to bring this flavor to the online experience. The options are myriad and open to the inventiveness of the Convener. One way of ‘circling’ everyone is to create a slide (fairly easy in PowerPoint) with pictures of the members of the circle, in a circle, and include it at the start of each ‘round’ of discussion. Prayers can be used at the beginning and the end to help invite the group into sacred time and space and to bring people gently out of it. Faith elements can be inserted anywhere along the path. The circle can agree to start—individually when they join the conversation—with a cup of tea and a centering act, and perhaps start all postings with a shared phrase as a way of joining together in cyberspace. Posts having to do with sub-discussions of personal things can be encouraged, but separated in various ways (subject line, say) from the main line of discussion. Sharing of phone numbers (or Skype name) can make it easy to call a member off-line for personal support and friendship.

A great strength of a circle is that everyone is equal—everyone’s opinion and thought is valued with equal attention, everyone has a voice. As in any circle everyone shares the joys, and everyone shares the responsibilities. In creating a Beijing Circle it is important to bring in members who are not only interested and want to learn from the circle, but who are also aware of the degree of commitment of time and participation that is going to be needed. Members who don’t fully participate not only miss out on their own benefit, but they reduce the benefit of the others in the circle.

We all have more experience with small discussion groups where we all get together at one or another’s home—it is easier to judge how much time we will have to commit, and what kind of commitment we will need to make. We also know to what degree we can prepare, or when pushed, whether we can get by with a little less preparation for a particular topic on occasion. Many of us do not have as clear a picture of how much of a commitment an online format will require—the technology is just too new. Since most of the interaction is written, it is harder to be a background player, and we can be surprised by that. As women we are often unsure of our own worth, and in face-to-face life we find ways to blend in unobtrusively—in an online Beijing Circle this is not as easy. Because the time scheme is not constrained, the discussion ranges over a broad period of time, and discipline is needed to be sure to participate in a timely manner.

In a face-to-face Beijing Circle, the group supports each person and, in particular, draws out anyone who isn’t participating. In a face-to-face discussion, someone—not necessarily the Convener, although that person needs to watch for this—will ask ‘Jane’ what she thinks if ‘Jane’ hasn’t said anything for awhile. There are subtle ways to encourage people to participate. In an online circle this gentle nudging is more difficult because it is more glaring. Face-to-face such a question is mild and soft, part of the ebb and flow of the conversation, while online that kind of question can seem harsh. So there

is greater pressure on the individual participants to drive themselves. While in many respects an online circle is like an online classroom experience, in this regard it is different—there are no grades, or other authority structures to help enforce personal responsibility. The hope is that the circle will create community and bring out the nurturing elements of our personalities. A Beijing Circle is created to provide a caring, but personally responsible environment.

Unexpected levels of intensity and commitment will cause the circle to shrink after a period of time—perhaps after four rounds. This is in addition to the usual shrinkage as circumstances change—a new pregnancy, a mother who needs greater care, a family move, and so on. So in planning your initial circle size it is a good idea to not start too small. The loss of members of the circle can be emotionally wrenching, but is a natural process, not a bad thing.

To date we don't have experience with growing a circle after it starts to shrink, but there is no reason why it shouldn't be possible. A true circle has no beginning and no end. Realize that in a face-to-face circle there is subtle pressure (and help) to continue with the circle because members probably share other activities—fixing breakfast for the homeless periodically, a knitting circle, Altar Guild, PTA work, or any of a myriad of other ways in which we see each other and commit to each other each day. These reinforcements are minimal in an online environment, making shrinkage more likely. And while online circles are likely to include a more diverse set of members who bring interesting and surprising gifts, there is a smaller basis for unity as well—one that must be built up through the interaction of the online community.

Members of circles come in all forms—some are academics, some are mothers, some are spiritual, some are talkers, some are ritualists. We intuit how to appreciate these different kinds of friends in a face-to-face situation—we do it all the time. The circle also is constituted with the idea of encouraging each member to express her talents in the way that is most productive for her. We don't yet know how to do this well in online formats. But it is useful for everyone to be thinking how to do it. How do we encourage a woman who has a beautiful sense of the presence of God in our lives, who can communicate that in her healing hands, but who is tongue-tied when needing to express a concept in words? How do we find a way for her to express herself well in an online circle? Because the format is primarily writing, those who are natural writers can overwhelm those who are artists or nurturers but not as good with words. There are ways—chat rooms, drawings, paintings, pictures, poems, prayers—that can give voice to everyone. It is important to encourage and treasure all the voices in the circle. Experiment, and trust the circle to learn.

Just as there are different kinds of talents, there are members who work in different styles. Some do well without a specific set of deadlines, while many require specific instructions to ensure they make time for the circle in their already busy schedules. No one approach seems to work for all, but clarity in what the expectations and style of the circle are seems to minimize this uniquely online issue. Each Convener needs to set the guidelines for the 'round' they are facilitating. That, of course, includes

- the topic or focus
- discussion of material
- a meditation, shared personal experience, a Biblical reflection

Experience shows that the Convener also needs to guide the group in time—e.g., starting post on Monday, primary posts from the members Friday through the next Monday, follow-up discussion through the next Friday, closing on Saturday.

The group should also agree up front on a basic structure—say one ‘gathering’ once a month, or once every two weeks, and so on, together with a set of common ritual elements, sacred elements to help the circle be one. We believe that it is also useful for each member to choose a round to convene at the beginning, as it reinforces the idea that all are equally responsible for the activity, and that all learn from each other. As time goes on, of course, members can switch their timing as needs arise, but the concept of shared leadership is planted early.

An online Beijing Circle can be managed through direct e-mail. However, the number of e-mails can pile up over time, and members have found that separating the online Beijing Circle material from other material—particularly if they have multiple things they are involved in online—can be difficult and confusing. One solution is to use folders—it’s fairly easy in most mail programs to create a folder into which all circle material goes, and even to create sub-folders for each round. And some members find that creating a personal diary or notebook (preferably the old fashioned handwritten kind) which jots down some of the personal insights on each member can help to make the circle take shape in flesh and blood—name of a partner, children, special experiences they have had, birthdays, and things that may need special prayers. These are personal ‘diaries’, not shared, but they help bridge the online format to the face-to-face version.

Experience has also shown that using Yahoo!Groups is a very helpful tool for online circles. A Yahoo!Group both organizes the material automatically and makes it available in a structured way to those who prefer to do their work directly online (i.e., not downloading all their mail to their own computer). The Yahoo!Group tools also allows files such as pictures, articles, and other reference material to be placed in common (‘sacred’) space where it can easily be found at all times. Creating and managing a Yahoo!Group is quite easy, even for technology-challenged people. Another thing that experience has taught to be useful is the periodic gathering of all the posts on a topic—say on a round or step of a round—into a single Word document and uploading it to the group—or e-mailing it directly to everyone. Each Convener is encouraged to do this at least at the end of the round, and even better, partway through it. This helps everyone feel the rhythm of the circle without the distractions of other e-mails, and particularly helps those who tend to be late with their posts.

Finally, our experience has shown that it may take a few tries to come to the best guidelines and agreements. For example, we discovered that there must be structure, but no particular structure seems to be better than another. People can be overwhelmed by the

sheer volume of posts, particularly if it is a large Circle, so brief posts are preferred. However, brief posts lose much of the detail and thoughtfulness that can be brought to the group. One of the strengths of the online format is that, unlike a face-to-face conversation, responses and ideas can be mulled over, slept on, and made more carefully. Introducing outside resources and sharing them is also a strength of the online form.

There is no real standard on how often or for how long a particular ‘round’ should go. People are busy—everyone has many other things they are committed to. People and families take vacations. And it is wise to remember that there is a wide variance in the computer skills of even those who agree to be part of an online circle. Lastly a face-to-face circle may be brought to common action more easily than the online circle due primarily to geographical distance. However, an online circle provides meaningful encouragement and resource sharing for individual efforts.

It is clear that setting up some initial choices in these things will smooth the initial process until you are practiced enough to revisit and revise your guidelines.