

Some Circle Wisdom

From Barrington,, Rhode Island Monica Bailey Daniels (a delegate from the Episcopal Church to the UNCSW) tells us about . . .

A Beijing Circle at St. John's . . .

In the fall of 2006, three women who saw the various needs of and for women came together to discuss how they could address these needs through their church. Ann Piper felt there was a need in the church for women to gather for study and discussion. Having attended United Nations Commission on the Status of Women as a visitor in 2006, Monica Daniels saw the need to bring world wide women issues into the St. John's parish and community. At more local level, Rev. Jennifer West knew there was a need for women to help and support women. They agreed to meet and review the Beijing Circle material that Monica had brought back from Office of Women's Ministries. After reviewing both the guide and the DVD, they knew they were on to something that had great potential, and it was decided that each would invite another woman to join them. Invitations were extended and Louann Diehl and Pat Nolan joined them for their Wednesday morning meetings. They spent time discussing the various Beijing Platform pieces and how they saw those issues not only world wide but right at their own doorstep. They prayed for direction and guidance because as Pat said "What can we do – these problems are so enormous?" The circle decided the best way to address these issues was to begin locally.

After Rev. Jennifer attended a local forum on the trafficking of women and girls for the local sex trade, the circle invited the Barrington chief of police to join them and discuss whether or not this was a problem in their community. He felt that trafficking was not and instead asked if they would consider becoming involved with the issue of domestic violence. This was an issue of some concern with him. He related that there was more domestic violence taking place in the community than the average citizen was aware of. The circle agreed to meet with a local agency and see in what ways they could be of assistance.

While discussing domestic violence, the members of the circle, which now had added two more members; Addie Crenson and Shara Gharib, made the connection between self-esteem and both dating and domestic abuse. It was decided that the circle would focus efforts to raise self-esteem and self-awareness among the pre-teens and teens. The thought being that if these children respect themselves and others, they would build positive relationships each other and this would lead to fewer cases of dating and domestic abuse. Several ideas that were discussed included hosting pre-teen workshops, developing positive dating groups both in the church and the local high schools.

On May 12, 2007 the circle will be hosting Dr. Sharon Maxwell as she will lead a workshop for mothers and daughters on the changes that pre-teen girls face as they head

into puberty. Invitations were extended not only to St. John's members but also members of other parishes and to members of the community. In the future the circle would like to something similar for boys and their dads.

Besides planting the seeds for building a positive self image in all our children, the circle continues to look for ways to connect to world wide community. Educating their fellow church members is important and the circle members will be hosting forums on the work at the UN, AWE and Beijing Circles. They are working to bring ONE to their congregation.

At each meeting they continue to discuss and pray over the issues and needs of women and children world wide. They also have prayed for each others needs. When discussing ways to support micro credit abroad, the circle realized they could "sweep at their own feet" by helping support one of their own members efforts to start her own business.

These amazing women have felt the call from God to reach out to those in need whether those needs are local or global. There may be few of them but they are powerful in their united efforts.

And from the Diocese of Newark and the Convocation of Province II . . .

Marge Christie, a delegate to the UNCSW from the Diocese of Newark, writes:

I suggested to the co-planner for our provincial convocation that there be workshop on the Beijing Circle process, and she worked the system so that it happened. Pat (Yankus – also a delegate to the UNCSW) and I were already registered to attend. Each workshop was offered twice, and at the first one there were eight women, including Bonnie Anderson.

We started with a brief (3 minutes) overview of the history of UNCSW, the Beijing Conference, the Anglican Delegation(s) and the Beijing Circles Manual. Then we showed the DVD /From Yonkers to Timor to set the stage. Following that we distributed copies we had made of the section on the Girl-Child, involved everyone in reading it aloud and then discussed the learnings and how a group could then move into some kind of action. We made it clear that we had chosen that section because we had just come from the 2007 UNCSW which had the Girl-Child as its theme, but that any group which began its circle life needed to choose the particular chapter which spoke to them and the particular pressing issues where they lived; that research needed to be done, facts collected and then potential action project(s) agreed on by the whole group.

Eighteen people, including 4 men, came to the second workshop so we divided the group in half making sure each circle had 2 men and proceeded along the same lines as the first except that we all watched the DVD together. I do believe that 8 or 9 is the perfect number to allow full participation of everyone. I imagine there are many opportunities for diocesan or regional first tries at doing a Beijing Circle, and the only additional strong suggestion would be that each participant commit to trying to start a circle in their own

locality -- which is what we did, of course. We also distributed a sheet with a listing of various web sites, which had on the reverse side the summary of an action circle already at work around farm worker justice. And, of course, made sure everyone knew how to either download the BC Manual or order it from the Women's Ministries Office.

Pat Yankus sent us the resource sheet that she and Marge used at the gathering. See it below.

Resources

ONE Episcopalian – <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/ONE/>

Office of Women's Ministries – www.episcopalchurch.org/women

Anglican Women's Empowerment and the UN Commission on the Status of Women – www.episcopalchurch.org/uncsw

Episcopal Relief and Development Educational Resources-
www.er-d.org

Episcopalians for Global Reconciliation <http://e4gr.org>

UN Millennium Development Goals – www.un.org/millenniumgoals/ or
www.millenniumcampaign.org

Beijing Platform for Action
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/index.html>

And one I'd like to add...

based on Jean Shinoda Bolen's book, The Millionth Circle, this web site is one of the single best for understanding the creation and dynamics of constructive and healing circles.

<http://millionthcircle.org/>