

Report Resulting in Formation of IAWN, November 1996

Consultation of Presidents/Chairs of Women's Organizations in the Anglican Communion

Fifteen women, representing 14 Provinces of the Anglican Communion, gathered at Mary Sumner House, headquarters of the Mothers' Union in London, England, from 21 to 27 November 1996, to discuss the possibility of forming an Anglican Women's Network. As well, the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women held in Beijing, China, in 1995 was discussed. The report of Gwennie Rukare, accredited NGO participant for the Anglican Communion was received.

On Sunday, the group worshipped at St. John's Wood Anglican Church. One of their number, the Rev. Canon Alice Medcof of Canada was the preacher.

The consultation approved two documents to be sent to the meeting of Primates of the Anglican Communion to be held in March 1997 in Jerusalem:

1. A communique which reports the findings of the consultation. Implicit in it is the hope that an Anglican Women's Network will become an official network of the Anglican Consultative Council, joining others such as Family, Youth, Peace and Justice, Refugee and Migrant, and Interfaith.
2. Gwennie Rukare's report on the 4th UN Conference on Women.

Extracts from official reports from each Province's representative, as well as stories told throughout the consultation

Australia-Elizabeth Appleby

Brazil-Maria Aparecida de Rosa

Canada-Alice Medcof

England-Angela Byram

Indian Ocean-Emmy Etienne

Ireland-Christine Eames

Japan-Toshiko Yoshimura

Kenya-Alice Nzimbi

Mexico-Ana Luisa del Aguila Alvarez

Philippines-Helen Uy

Southern Africa-Elizabeth Barnes

Uganda-Gwennie Rukare

United States-Gini Peterson

West Africa-Juliana Okine

Australia-Elizabeth Appleby

Elizabeth is president of Mothers' Union. It has no women's desk. Women's Commission of General Synod meet annually and reports to General Synod. There is the Mother's Union in each diocese. Each member annually gives A\$3 to Mary Sumner House. Anglican Church Women are in about half the dioceses. Girls' Friendly Society in most places. There are good attempts to face change and to be relevant.

Movement for the Ordination of Women. Not all dioceses allow women priests. Other groups: aboriginals, women clergy, religious orders, National Council of Women, and ecumenical groups such as World Day of Prayer.

Areas of concern: domestic violence, child abuse, violence in the media, substance abuse, health issues, sexuality, youth employment, relationship to Asia and the Pacific, representation on church bodies, and women's ordination.

Her hope: the network will share stories and make us aware of the global church.

Brazil-Maria Aparecida de Rosa

The seven dioceses of the Province of Brazil each have a diocesan committee of Union of Anglican Women in Brazil (UmeAB).

The church is the reference point for women in a society of changing customs, prejudice, poverty and violence. Women are trained as counselors, youth teachers, and in alternative medicines, such as syrups,

pommades, herb teas, which are given out free to the needy. They work ecumenically through Latin American Council of Churches and the National Christian Council.

Her hope: say 'no' to all things that lead to death; 'yes' to those which lead to life.

Canada-Alice Medcof

Alice represented women's groups of Canada, but has no official position. All dioceses have Anglican Church Women, or parallel group, which link nationally through the Toronto diocesan Anglican Church Women office. Mothers' Union is in the east and the west, and is a part of the national ACW meetings.

Women's ordination is accepted; we have one woman bishop.

Women of Religious Orders, Council of Native ministries, women who focus on economic justice, inclusive language, and gender justice all have a voice. Fourteen women went to Beijing.

Much work is done ecumenically and in partnership with men: Canadian Council of Churches, Ten Days for Global Justice, ARCIC, Economic Justice, Violence Against Women, and so forth. News about Thursdays in Black generated much interest, especially from John Peterson, who had been Warden of St. George's Jerusalem.

Thank you Penny Cumine.

Her hope: for an international network that is rooted in prayer, is transformative and inclusive of all women.

England-Angela Byram

Angela is president of the Mothers' Union of the Province of York. Mothers' Union is very active throughout England, focusing on family life and all its challenges from youth in prison, to providing low cost vacations for caregivers who are burned out, from supervising play areas in visitor centers, to teaching new mothers how to care for babies. FLAME (Family Life and Marriage Education) is active in most dioceses.

Indian Ocean-Emmy Etienne

Mothers' Union is active throughout Seychelles, Mauritius and Madagascar. Seychelles is 96 percent Christian, so church's influence is strong. Evangelism is strong, but gender issues restrict women's activism.

Madagascar faces communication difficulties because of its size and bad roads. French predominates, though in some places only Malagasy is spoken. The challenge: freedom, marriage failure, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, AIDS, and the right to an education.

Her hope is that we establish a network that will grow stronger in the future.

Ireland-Christine Eames

Christine is World Wide President of the Mothers' Union. By tradition, women have always played an important role in the life of the Church of Ireland. The clergy wife/bishop's wife has had an important role in their own right. The Mothers' Union has played a crucial role in the lives of women, especially in the rural areas: all of this in the context of violence and religious prejudice, so the church's membership must continue to be that of peacemakers.

Ordained women are accepted everywhere. Women participate in the synodical process. Girls' Friendly Society plays a significant role in the development of young women.

Mothers' Union paid for six women to attend the consultation.

Her hope: that women learn from each other and strengthen each other through the network.

Japan-Toshiko Yoshimura

Toshiko represents the women's union of Nippon Sei Ko Kai, the Anglican Church of Japan. The union is 100 years old. She brings thanks for help given during the earthquake. Japan learned the weakness of high technology: it couldn't save any person at all, only people's hands could help people's hearts with love in our Lord.

The Christian population of Japan is 0.08 percent, but the schools that were established by missionaries over the last 130 years have resulted in zero illiteracy in Japan. Christianity has had a great impact and most of the work has been done by women.

Women are not allowed to sit in General Synod, though one woman is on the Standing Committee. Toshiko is grateful for the consultation. If an

international network comes into being, then she hopes that women's participation in church life in Japan will become possible.

United Thank Offering goes to support work in Asia and Africa.

Her hope is that the network will enhance the status of women in Nippon Sei Ko Kai.

Kenya-Alice Nzimbi

The rural African woman is responsible for multiple labour-intensive and time consuming chores inside and outside of the household: cooking, fetching water and fuel, child care, husband care, food cultivation, preservation and storage. A simple development aid project such as a well can allow women to exploit their potential as community leaders. In 1992 the International Fund for Agricultural Development disclosed that 66.1 million rural women were the heads of their households caring for 333 million other family members. These women are not landowners and unable to rise out of poverty. Men leave for urban centers or other countries. The rural labour force is increasingly feminized.

The Beijing Platform for Action is being implemented, but it is the urban politically active woman that seems to reap the benefits.

The girl-child is expected to do woman's work; her brother can go to school.

The church's development board has four focuses: agricultural (better means of farming), community-based health care, water (different ways of harvesting water), and social development.

Her hope: if woman's lot is to change, women must act. Her theological contribution: woman is worthy because she completed God's creation. God did not need to do anything further.

Mexico-Ana Luisa del Aguila Alvarez

Ana is Provincial Coordinator of the United Thank Offering. Women's work is geared mainly to women: spiritual retreats, prayer meetings, conferences, workshops on family violence, give women a sense of their value through training.

The Diocese of Cuernavaca, through the Sisterhood of Mary, will carry out a programme in the community on hygiene, nutrition, and the use of soy.

Her hope is to feel more united and closer to this big Anglican family that we belong to.

Philippines-Helen Uy

Helen heads up the Episcopal Church Women. Inside the church ECW works on evangelism, spirituality, training as worship leaders, education, environment such as planting fruit bearing trees on church property, and synodical process. In the community it meets the challenges of violence against women, women's health and reproductive rights, and grassroots cooperatives. Helen is a landowner: 2,000 mango trees, harvests 50 bushels of peanuts, many acres of rice, and 150 men work for her.

Her hope: vibrant advocates for sustain transformation for holistic involvement.

Southern Africa-Elizabeth Barnes

Elizabeth is president of the Anglican Women's Fellowship. She brings greetings from Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane and paid tribute to Desmond Tutu who called them rainbow people of a rainbow nation.

Anglican women are active in building a new country through prayer and worship, mission and witness, study and service. Each diocese is very different, with its unique culture, racial mix, languages, and place of women.

Uganda-Gwennie Rukare

Gwennie is president of the Mothers' Union, which is the oldest woman's organization in Uganda (since 1908), with full-time national staff. It is growing, but it is aware of the contemporary socio-economic forces which are weakening Christian family ties. It works on child health care, safe motherhood, family planning, environmental conservation, literacy, counseling, and HIV/AIDS strategies.

Beijing has sensitized the country. Women are eager to take on new challenges such as grassroots economic development, changing cultural norms, and resisting gender discrimination. She told a shock story of a woman who went to her bishop for advice. Her husband had wandered and was not home, HIV positive. She asked if she should take him back. "Yes," replied the bishop, "you married him for better or for worse." In a year, he was dead and in two years she was dead. If the church is supporting the Platform for Action, then it needs to take seriously the section that states that women have a right to protect their health.

Her hope: to have a network.

United States-Gini Peterson

Gini is president of Episcopal Church Women. ECW is but one of 17 groups under the umbrella of the Council of Women's Ministries which covers many, many issues. They have well-research programmes: such as Women to Women, Women of vision, GATES, a magazine.

The United Thank Offering of the ECW paid for six women to attend the consultation.

Her hope: that the network will enable communication, shared spirituality, sharing of programmes.

West Africa-Juliana Okine

Juliana is president of Mothers' Union. She is from Ghana, which has a women's desk at the national office. Girls' Friendly Society is active in most areas.

Major concerns are: education and training of women, health, violence against women, and street children. They work hard at raising awareness of AIDS and female mutilation. Women's employment is created by teaching how to make soap, sheanut butter, kente weaving and baking bread.

Liberian relief efforts are ongoing.

Her hope: that the network will enable sharing of stories and resources.