



Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace

## *The Power and Promise of Peace*

### **LENTEN FAST – WEEK FOUR**

#### **FASTING FROM VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

Women represent over fifty percent of the population. They are the primary food and care providers in much of the world, and yet they represent only a fraction of those in power. Over the week we will consider three different forms of violence that disproportionately affect women. Economic marginalization, the trafficking of women and children, and domestic violence are pressing issues in our community and around the world. It is important to remember that many times women, especially those marginalized by socio-economic factors, face great challenges as social norms, legal structures and tradition limit their ability to survive in the status quo.

As Christians our worldly distinctions melt away and our commitment to one another becomes paramount. Paul clearly states in 1 Corinthians: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it." Our challenge is to live so that we might realize that vision. If there are struggles and challenges facing one part of the body, it is our duty to work together to overcome that challenge. We know that a system that allows for the abuse and neglect of one group of people by another is not in keeping with God's plan. The real question, is how might we endeavor to change that system so that the entire body might be honored?

In 1988, the World Council of Churches called for a sustained effort to challenge the systems that kept (and still keep) half of humanity at risk when it launched the **Ecumenical Decade: The Churches in Solidarity with Women**. The ten-year program enabled women to plan, initiate, resist, challenge and witness in new ways and with new energy. Ecumenical and secular networks expanded and overlapped during this decade as women sought to speak out on topics previously thought taboo.

One example: In the United States, the Clothesline Project began in 1990, when the Cape Cod Women's Agenda hung out 32 shirts on the town green in Hyannis, Massachusetts, each color coded for the type of violence that women face: rape, battery, incest, and murder among them. Five years later in a tent at the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women, China that drew 45,000 women together from all walks of life, a section of that clothesline (by then greatly expanded to many states, countries and global venues) was hung for all to see. A sobering, traveling memorial, used by secular organizations and religious groups alike, the clothesline invited onlookers to mentally add the women they have known who have suffered the forms of violence named and to recognize both the universality and the particularity each shirt conveyed.

Hundreds of efforts to address violence against women had, of course, been made largely by women's groups before the decade began. Overcoming poverty has long been a goal of the churches while trafficking has increasingly been documented as a major threat to the safety of women and youth. The first shelters for women, for example, opened in the U.S. and Canada in

1973 and 1974 respectively, and even before that, women took each other into their own homes to provide temporary sanctuaries.

The new ingredient in all these efforts was the ringing call to the churches to become part of the naming, caring and advocating community. In the process, the abuse of power in and by the churches was confronted; its silence in the face of the effects of violence on women, condemned. Over the ten-year period, God was re-imagined; new liturgies were created and prayers became more explicit. In 1998, the Pre-Assembly Gathering of Women at the WCC Eighth Assembly (Harare, Zimbabwe), became the culminating event where the achievements and continuing challenges were honestly stated and where women of all ages celebrated the joy of being who they were: beloved daughters of God, trusted sisters of Jesus, and signs of the Holy Spirit, powerful and moving among us all.

## **Economic Marginalization Resources**

The Association of Women in International Development ([www.awid.org](http://www.awid.org)) and Women's Environment and Development Organization ([www.wedo.org](http://www.wedo.org)) are two organizations dedicated to address the unique challenges facing women in development. For instance consider that in Sub-Saharan Africa women produce 78% of the food but receive between 2 and 13% of technical assistance and training.

Also, the AFL-CIO has a good website on women and labor rights  
[www.aflcio.org/yourjobeconomy/women/global/WorkersRights.cfm](http://www.aflcio.org/yourjobeconomy/women/global/WorkersRights.cfm)

An introduction to economic justice:  
[www.pcusa.org/churchsociety/novdec2000/intro.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/churchsociety/novdec2000/intro.htm)

## **Trafficking of Women and Children Resources**

ECPAT USA and ECPAT international is a strong and effective coalition of organizations dedicated to the eradication of child prostitution and trafficking. ([www.ecpatusa.org](http://www.ecpatusa.org))

Also, UNICEF's website provides an excellent introduction to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of women and children around the world.  
[www.unicef.org/voy/explore/cse/explore\\_cse.php](http://www.unicef.org/voy/explore/cse/explore_cse.php)

PC(USA) resources:  
[www.pcusa.org/womensadvocacy/sistersmercy/index.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/womensadvocacy/sistersmercy/index.htm)

## **Domestic Violence Resources**

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence has a comprehensive list of Organization Contacts ([www.ncadv.org/links.htm](http://www.ncadv.org/links.htm)).

Presbyterian Church (USA)'s offers a statement and study guide responding to domestic violence ([www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/dancing.pdf](http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/dancing.pdf))

Resources from ELCA on Domestic Violence:  
[www.womenoftheelca.org/cafe/issue0203/hottopic.html](http://www.womenoftheelca.org/cafe/issue0203/hottopic.html)

Faith Trust Institute: a multi-faith organization dedicated to addressing domestic violence in religious contexts ([www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org))

## Advocacy

- Consider one or more of the following actions to speak with power on this issue.
- Think about how you define domestic violence and consider how you would approach a friend/relative whom you believed was being abused? Ask what your church is doing to respond to domestic violence.
- Volunteer time at a local domestic violence shelter.
- Research to see if your community has a way to respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and if the local police officials and social workers are prepared to help women who have been trafficked or are victims of abuse. If your community does not have this information, consider how you might be able to help them gain that training/ information.
- Look up working conditions in the country of origin label inside your clothes and research where your clothes are being manufactured. Women represent a significant percentage of those employed in sweatshops.

## Prayer

*Great God of Creation;  
Merciful God of Salvation;*

*We come before you now because the world is not right. We come in this season of preparation and we struggle to see a new way.*

*For Hagar we pray for the women who are abandoned. Help us find a way to show them your love and protection.*

*For Ruth and Naomi we pray for the women who are caught in a struggle to survive, forced by tradition and economic hardship to scrape by. Help us to remember that you can use them and that through them great things are made.*

*For Deborah we pray for the wisdom of our sisters, Help us to hear their words and respect their authority.*

*For Rahab we pray for the women who society scorns and discounts. They are your daughters, help us to see you in them.*

*For Esther we pray for women who lead their communities, who risk persecution for speaking out. Help us to have the courage to stand by these leaders.*

*God who is in all things, you promised to pour out your spirit upon all flesh, that your sons and daughters will prophesy. Help us to live that prophecy, help us to open our eyes to the world and the injustice in this world.*

*God who called women and men to discipleship use us. Amen*

