

AUSTRALIAN CHURCH WOMEN WELCOMES AN INTERNATIONAL VISITOR.

In January a Reception was held by the National Committee of Australian Church Women to welcome Miss Dorothy Wagner and introduce her to a representative gathering of women from the various church organisations as well as those from the National Council of Women and the Pan Pacific South East Asia Women's Association. The Executive and members of the State Unit of Australian Church Women were also guests on this occasion.

Miss Wagner was welcomed by Miss Doris Mitchell, Secretary of the National Committee and introduced by Deaconess Mary Andrews. Miss Wagner thanked Miss Andrews and said: "I hope too great expectations have not been raised by Mary's very generous introduction. I would like to tell you that I am a very ordinary person to whom God has entrusted a very extraordinary privilege and responsibility both as I serve with Church Women United and the International Committee for the Women's World Day of Prayer. I often wonder how it happened that such a great privilege should be entrusted to me; and I sit in my office in New York and think I have the privilege of being in touch with women throughout the world, that it is really a holy place to me.

It is a privilege to be in Australia for the first time. For many years, Australian women who have come to our Country, have been guests of Church Women in the United States and we have valued the relationships that have been built up in that way; but because we are separated by so many miles geographically, there have been relatively few opportunities for us to come together as church women and as women in our societies sharing some of our common concerns, and being strengthened by one another's faith and experience. So when I was invited to the Assembly of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations in Bangalore, I decided to make a little detour of a few thousand miles and all through an area where I had never had opportunity to visit - Fiji, New Zealand, Australia and then on to Singapore and Sri Lanka. to meet with Church Women.

And as I did this - well, once upon a time I would have said I am wearing two hats but as few of us are wearing hats, I say I am carrying a 2-sided calling card, because on this journey I am representing Church Women United in the U.S.A, and in my responsibility there, I am called (and I don't like the title), the Director for International Community. For a number of years I had the title "Co-Ordinator" and I liked that much better because I really feel that my role is being an "enabler" and a "catalyst" helping women of our churches and our country to establish a meaningful relationship with women across the world. My services are seconded to the International World Day of

and in that responsibility I am responsible to an executive committee that has a representative of women from all parts of the world. During this time our chair person is Mary Fadel of Egypt and my last stop on this journey will be to be with her as we look toward the future planning for the international committee. And I would bring to you, both the very warm greetings of Church Women United and of our Executive Director, Martha Edens, and of the International Committee for the World Day of Prayer and especially from Mary Fadel.

This morning, I have been asked to share with you what Church Women United is, and how we seek to relate to women in other parts of the world.

Church Women United is a national movement in the U.S.A of Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox women who come together to express the ecumenical dimensions of our faith and then in a visible fellowship together, to seek to witness to Jesus Christ in our Society in our concern for global issues throughout the world; and our bonds as Church Women United are in our Christian faith, in our identity as women, and in our commitment to fulness and wholeness of our life together for all people. There are units of Church Women United in more than 2,000 local communities in the U.S.A, and then each of our fifty States and Washington D.C. ~~are~~ have a unit. And to some degree at each level in these 2,000 communities, the State unit and the national movement are autonomous but are inter-related. The heart of our movement as Church Women United is our coming together in three days of celebration - and one is World Day of Prayer, common to women in more than 150 countries in the world, and one of the ways in which we feel very closely bound together with women of the whole world. A second day, we call May Fellowship Day, and in that, we focus ^{on} our relationships and responsibilities in our local communities, as we work together ecumenically. And the third one grows out of the history of our Church Women United which became a movement bringing together ecumenical groups of women in organisations that had been concerned with world mission, national mission for local ecumenical action into an organisation which is now called Church Women United. That happened in 1941, when the world was in the midst of war - when women in the U.S.A, and I'm sure it is true of women across the world, carried a special concern for peace building and justice in our global society. And so our World Community Day through these years focussed on these issues. We do not have units of Church Women United anywhere else in the world; we do not have programmes and projects anywhere else in the world; But we value greatly, and are deeply enriched, by our relationships with women in other parts of the world, relationships that come through ecumenical women's organisations such as Australian Church Women, through regional ecumenical groupings of women such

as the Asian Church Women's Conference. Much of our relationships come through our knowing individual women across the world with whom we share common concerns. Of course, World Day of Prayer is one of the meaningful ways in which we relate, and on the one hand Church Women United provide staff services to the World Day of Prayer; on the other hand, great enrichment comes into our movement because we do then have opportunity to be related to women throughout the world.

With other women across the world, we share the Fellowship of the Least Coin and from its beginning, Church Women in the United States were part of this Fellowship. As Church Women United, we have very deep concern for justice, peace and local community and because we realise that we are living in a time when every issue and concern that we have in our country has global dimensions, to try to seek to have ways in which we can be in touch with the global community. One of these ways is through a programme which we call christian "Causeways", and over the period of many years now, we have tried to find ways of walking together with our sisters in another part of the world, bringing together women of different countries, cultures, churches and traditions, looking together at some of the common concerns that we have, seeking to know how we can come into deeper understanding of one another, seeking to know how together we can be mutually supportive in the efforts we are making, and how perhaps also, in some cases, we can even be involved together in some common action.

While I have worked with Church Women United for just five years, I have worked with Church Women United as part of my responsibility with United Presbyterian Women for many more years than that, and I have been in touch with the programme of christian Causeways from its very beginning, when the first Causeway was to Africa. When I began my own service with Church Women United, my very first responsibility was following through on plans for a christian Causeway to Asia. 48 women went from the United States of America; we divided into four teams of twelve each, and each team visited two Asian countries; and then we came together in Japan with Japanese women and women of the Asian countries we had visited, focussing at that time, on what we, as women, can do to be builders of peace in a world where we are seeking for peace with justice and human dignity. Out of the relationships that developed there, Church Women United in the United States have had a very deep interest in the human rights issues in Asia, and particularly in Korea, where Korean Church Women United, the ecumenical women's group there, have been in the forefront of the Human rights struggle.

Because we came to know these women personally, because we came to know as we were among them, the concerns that they were carrying for the poor and the oppressed in their society, for political prisoners, women who were exploited in industry and in

the tourist trade, we felt we could be alongside of them in their struggle. On the one hand, we had been deeply enriched by our relationship with women of faith who lay their very lives and liberty on the line for what they believe is the call of the Christian Gospel. On the other hand, at very crucial times in that struggle, we have been able to express our concerns as Christian women, through our Government and our Churches about the Human Rights struggle. There are some who believe that it has been the concern expressed by many women in many parts of the world that has kept some of the women who have been arrested and tried, from being actually imprisoned in Korea. When I was there for the first week in October on the way to the Asian Church Women's Conference, I met with some of these women; they're just incredible women, and I think when I am with them of the passage from Hebrews "of the heroes of faith of whom the world is not worthy." I met with mothers and wives of political prisoners in Korea whilst I was there. One of the things that I am hoping for is that our concerned Christian women from the United States, from Germany and Japan - and hopefully I would be grateful if Australian women could be included - might come together with them and talk about the impact of multi-national co-operation on the lives of the young working women of Korea. Now this is something we have to do very quietly and without publicity. We are not sure whether it can really happen; but as Church Women in the United States, we have responded that if and when this possibility opens, we do want to be ready to go and I know that Australian women and the Australian churches are concerned about the Human Rights issue in Korea. I think this is one of many areas where we have common concerns. Church Women United have been deeply concerned about Human Rights issues through our history. Even before the Civil Rights movement in our own country, our Church Women United had a programme called "Assignment Race" trying to deal with issues of racism and that concern is an on-going one.

But for many women, Church Women United has been the place where women of different races, ethnic and cultural backgrounds have been able to come together as sisters and work together side by side. Many of our churches are really segregated communities of one class and one kind of people, and so it has meant much to us through Church Women United to have this diversity. We find diversity is a great enrichment and we also know that at times, we do not deal with it in the most meaningful and constructive way. Because we have been so far separated by the miles as I said before, we have not had opportunity to walk alongside our sisters in the South Pacific and New Zealand and Australia but the more we get to know about this part of the world, the more we realise how much we share in common. In some sense we share a common history and as I read

some things about your country and know about my country, we share some common sins such as our relationship to the original populations of our countries and to some of the ethnic minorities in our countries. We share common concerns for the whole issue of militarism and nuclear power and the environment. I know in this International Year of the Child we share deep concern for our children, not only in the family, but in all the ways in which the situations in our society affect the lives of children.

So we are hoping that in September, a group of church women from all parts of our country - and we hope it will be a very diverse group, representing not only the variety of our church traditions which are part of us - but also from groups that make up Church Women United can come to this area of the world. We appreciated very much the invitation from the National Committee of Australian Church Women asking that we be with them at their National Committee Meeting in September, and at that Assembly we will have opportunities of dialogue together. And so around that invitation, we are trying to build a Causeway experience, that would bring us first here to Australia, and while the time will be short, we hope we can get some in-depth understanding of your church and your society and discover together common interests and perhaps common action; and then we want to move on to New Zealand and meet with women there. I was there for a few days before coming on here, and I realised how many things we share in common; and then go to Fiji and meet with women of the Pacific area. When I was there for a few days, I was shocked to see a headline which said: "Three Fijians shot in Lebanon." The last thing I would have expected was that Fiji was involved in the Lebanese civil war, but they are there in the United Nations Peace Keeping Force; and somehow, it underlined for me in a very dramatic way how inter-related and inter-dependent we are across the world. And it seems to me that the Christian community has a particular responsibility of finding ways in which we can together work and serve and witness together in our global society.

At the moment we have a group of ten women in Cuba. For the first time in twenty years, it has been possible for church women in the United States to visit with their sisters in Cuba. I went to Jamaica to see them off a few weeks ago, and it will be very interesting to have a new understanding of what it means to live and witness as a Christian community in the socialist society of Cuba.

During our Bi-centennial, church women all across the United States decided to have study groups and to prepare what we have called "The People's Platform for a Just

Global Society"; and out of this study during that Bi-Centennial Year, we developed a platform with ten planks. I am just going to name these, and as I name them I am sure you will see that, not only in your church women's organisations, but in all of

your women's groups, are issues in which you are concerned. The issue that was given highest priority was WORLD HUNGER; and in that, we have to include in shame, hunger in our affluent United States; we had HEALTH CARE - an area of great concern where we do not have a programme of national health, and this has become very difficult for many people. We included concern for our ENVIRONMENT; concern for EDUCATION; Concern for our whole CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM; for FAMILY STABILITY; for HOUSING - which is a great problem; for HUMAN RIGHTS; for PEACE and MILITARY SPENDING. And I'm sure, as I hope I can hear from you in your organisations, if you were to share some of the issues which you are working on in Australia, in your own country, and as part of the global society, we would find that many of those issues are common issues.

I am very interested to be able to meet with those who are not only from church women's groups, but from others, such as your National Council of Women and from your Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association. One of the policies of Church Women United is to work in coalition with others around common concerns. We have not had a National Council of Women. Since International Women's Year something similar is coming into being in what we call a "Coalition for a National Women's Agenda"; and many of our church women's groups are part of this Coalition, working together with other women's groups on issues that we feel have particular impact on the lives of women.

We are very concerned about the empowerment of our women, both in our churches and in our society. While we do not have programmes or projects across the world, our inter-continental mission which comes from World Day of Prayer and World Community Day, we do support across the world, programmes that are empowering women and they are dealing on a global basis with the issues in our People's Platform.

There are so many things I would like to share with you. I'd just like to mention that every three years, we have an Ecumenical Assembly, and some of you have been at these Assemblies. In 1980 the last week in June, the Assembly is going to be in Los Angeles. We put it as near as we could to Asia and the Pacific region and we hope that in a return visit, women from the Pacific area and Australia and New Zealand will be able to attend that Assembly and be not guests there, because we feel that the presence and petition and participation of international women are an integral part of the Assembly because it is a way of getting the global issues before us.

Our theme is going to be: "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME"; and we want to look at what it means in our times and in our societies that the Good News is preached, that the oppressed are free, the blind see, and that the captives are released. There will be many work groups, bible study, worship. And we hope very much that some of

you can be with us the last week of June in 1980. We cannot offer travel to women coming to us from across the world; but we have set aside a budget, and we hope those coming will be our guests at the Assembly itself.

There is a lot else I could say, but I want to give you opportunity if there is a little time for questions. But I would value very much hearing from some of you what are the things that you in Australia are concerned about, and some of the things that you are doing together.

In closing, I would like to read some lines from a book that has meant very much to me in these last few years as we have been relating to our issues of the whole world. It is by Thomas Merton, a Roman Catholic who died in Thailand just ten years ago, and the book is called "He is With Us."

Christ is the Lord of a history that moves.
He not only holds the beginning and the end in His hand
But He is in history with us, walking ahead of us where we are going.
He is not always in the same place.
As we are called to believe that Christ once rose from the dead
We are called to experience the Resurrection in our own lives.
By entering into this dynamic movement and following Christ who lives in us
This life, this dynamism is expressed by the power of love and of encounter.
Christ lives in us if we love one another,
and our love for one another means involvement in one another's history.
Christ lives in us and leads us through mutual encounter and commitment
into a new future which we feel together for one another.
The future is called, the Kingdom of God.
The Kingdom is already established, it is a present reality.
There is still work to be done - Christ calls us to work
together in building His Kingdom; we co-operate with Him
in bringing it to perfection.

And so we look forward to walking a Causeway with our sisters in Australia, seeking to listen to one another, to learn from one another, and to come to love one another in the kind of love that does not consist in gazing at one another, but in looking outward together in the same direction.

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