

AUSTRALIAN CHURCH WOMEN

WOMEN AT WORK



SEEKS:

- 1) To unite Australian women in their allegiance to their Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ;
- 2) To help Christian women to take a more effective place in the total life & mission of the Church.

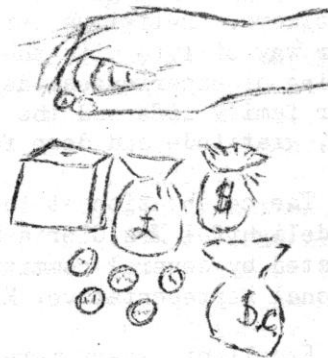
FEBRUARY 1981

FELLOWSHIP OF THE LEAST COIN JUBILEE

Mark 12: 44

"They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything - all she had to live on."

Because at least one woman took our Lord and Saviour's word literally, great things have been achieved in these past 25 years.



F.L.C. SILVER JUBILEE CELEBRATION
Report by Marie Price F.L.C. Convenor

Towards the close of last November, twelve Australian Church women met in the Philippines, with almost two hundred other Christian women, invited from thirty five countries. The splendid occasion was to commemorate twenty five fruitful years of the movement of the Fellowship of the Least Coin, which has its roots in Manila. Happily two members of the original group were present at the Jubilee ceremonies. Delegates from around the world delighted in the face-to-face meeting, the sharing in the thanksgiving to God and the messages of encouragement from such esteemed women.

The two were Mrs Margaret Shannon-Myers who led the International Fellowship Team from America to Asia in 1956, and Mrs Shanti Solomon, an Indian member of the team, who because of her prayer and concern for peace, was moved to inspire Christian women to pray frequently for inner peace and reconciliation with others. Her unique idea of offering the smallest coin of one's country as a visible token of prayer, has tremendous appeal to ever-growing numbers of women. It was originally accepted by Philippine women who within that initial year had the first dedication of Least Coins at a conference in Manila.

Fitting then, that Manila should be selected to be the Host city for the Jubilee participants. Filipino hospitality was generous indeed, from the delightful gesture of large trays of luscious fruit in each room in the city hotel to the magnificence of the rural areas where delegates spent a memorable weekend. People in private homes and churches throughout the provinces had well-prepared programmes of welcome, religious services and entertainment, in order to share their way of life with the foreign visitors. During the later sharing of experiences, delegates spoke of the joy of villagers in their family life and the obvious awareness of their sense of dependence, gratitude and deep faith in God.

The celebration at the El Grande Hotel, Manila, was chaired by the delightful Mrs Gloria Santos who is President of ACWC. She was assisted by several committee members, among whom was our own National Representative, Mrs Rachel Cocks.

Excellent papers were presented on the Jubilee theme of Prayer, Partnership and Peace, and workshop discussions followed. These were valuable for the close contact with an Anglican from Canada,

a Baptist from Russia, Uniting Church members from Hong Kong, U.S.A. and India. The Partnership Group was led by a delegate from Uruguay. A local Sister Mary John Mananzan, addressed the gathering on social concerns for women. The deep concern of each woman, irrespective of her religious belief or nationality, was that the love of Christ be shared by all people; that peace be in every country; that innocent men and women be freed from imprisonment; that leaders would abandon the huge expenditure of wealth for weapons and that the desperate lot of the hungry and poverty stricken be alleviated.

Before breakfast each day, two-room groups met for "Sambahayan" - a family meeting for prayer. In Room 341 the Filipino hostess (a charming lady who was the wife of a Bishop) organized us for readings: a mini group of nations, an African, Japanese, Korean, American and Australian, together praising God and thanking Him for His care.

There were serious Bible study periods and times of light-hearted singing together; solemnity at the opening Church service, where Australians carried their special Banner along with those borne by sixteen other national representatives. Later the organizing committee presented medallions for these entries. At the opening ceremony also, welcome addresses were given by dignitaries of the republic of the Philippines. There was great interest in the songs sung by national groups. Australians were justly proud of their contribution written by South Australian Mrs Margaret Knauerhase and set to music by Tasmanian Mrs Joan McKercher.

Great sadness prevailed one evening during the viewing of a television programme brought to the celebration by a Korean lady after having obtained permission of her Government. Her intense desire was to inform women from around the world, of the unhappy plight of thousands of her country men, women and children. At the time of the war the Koreans worked in Japan where they were citizens of no-class. They are now the unfortunate victims and descendants of the dreadful destruction and aftermath of the Atom Bombs. A limited post-war compensation was given by the Japanese, but there is a new generation which continues to suffer inherited disabilities. Women's Groups in Japan have frequently pressed the Government for financial help for the afflicted people who are unable to work and care for themselves. By showing the film it was hoped that viewers in their sympathy would later ask their Governments to release the story so that there would be a wider dissemination of the facts. The film is to be shown in Japan soon for the first time. It was recommended that the United Nations be approached for help.

It was a delight to meet with Australia's Prayer-Partner, Mrs Esther Galstin, Rangoon, Burma. Esther spent approximately two months trying to get permission from her Government to attend the Jubilee. Now, she is hopefully planning to visit Brisbane in March this year.

A grand celebration dinner was attended by each of the six Presidents of F.L.C. spanning the years since the beginning: surely a tremendous historic happening. Australia shared in that event through Mrs Rathie Selvaratnam who was Chair-person in 1966/70.

A day bus tour of metro Manila was fascinating; a picnic lunch in a shady park was an enjoyable interlude. We visited the USSR Trade Exhibition displaying many beautiful manufactured goods. In the humid heat we staggered up and down wooden stairways and through huge rooms of early furniture in the Rizal Shrine of the first national hero. It was an experience to walk across a stone bridge beneath which brown skinned boys stood in murky water holding aloft coloured nets - not to catch flying fish or butterflies, but needed pesos from generous tourists above. We admired a beautiful formal garden and prayed silently for all those who had suffered and died in that former quadrangle and in the prisons close by, through the centuries and during world war II. The Tondo foreshore area, the slum dwelling place of 27,000 families in the late sixties, was originally reclaimed for a planned international port, but immediately after the war, people unsettled from their devastated farms and homes, congregated in the space close to the city.

A sixty five million dollar project for improving conditions for the people, was begun in the early seventies; however, there are yet many families with shelters of palings and scrap materials. From the coach, we saw only smiling, happy faces; nevertheless much sadness and hardship must have been hidden. Stories were told of families living in a small cart holding their few possessions which they push around from place to place; they bathe in the river and eat when and where they can. Some workers earn ten pesos daily (about a dollar), and if night shift is required, they continue without the benefit of overtime pay. If workers leave their jobs for any reason, there are always many who will gladly replace them in order to buy rice for their children.

A sharp contrast was evident in our drive through the fabulous millionaire row, arriving at the Polo Club where we were feted with

laden tables of exotic foods, hot, sweet ginger tea and iced punch. We rested on the garden seats taking in the cooler evening air and the beauty of the outline of leafy trees overhanging extensive lawns on which horses and players co-ordinated their game. We wondered how the wealthy in this life style could have any comprehension of the needs, or even the existence of the "little" people, whose only security is in the magnitude of their numbers.

The Manila celebration in every way was magnificent, from the simple beauty of the hand embroidery by Filipinos of participants' signatures on the altar cloth, to the quiet dignity of two ordained women celebrating the closing Eucharist, and finally the nostalgic moments when the entire group, each person holding a lighted candle, encircled the room while singing in chorus, "Take my life and let it be, ever, only, all for Thee".

My opportunity to share in the Silver Jubilee Celebration of the Fellowship of the Least Coin in Manila, was indeed a special gift from God - I am truly grateful; and now in 1981, when each country will organize its particular commemoration, may the prayers for Peace and Reconciliation be increased and intensified.

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Rathie Selvaratnam wrote to Women at Work: "Greetings for the New Year, and with the new demands and expectations and needs, we have the assurance of God's wonderful care and providence of us. May He continue to uphold you in your work and witness". Rathie mentioned her visit, while in Colombo, with Malini, our Winifred Kiek Scholar for 1981: "It was such a pleasure to do and a delightful young woman who is going to benefit with this scholarship." She also spoke of her attendance at the Silver Jubilee celebrations in Manila: "It seemed a historic meeting to those of us who had a part in the vision Margaret Shannan-Myers envisaged" along with Shanti.

Rathie enclosed an article about her African trip, and we have included it in this issue.

Editor.

F.L.C. GRANTS : State Units are reminded that applications for grants need to be forwarded to the Working Committee before the end of May. Application forms available on request.

THE ALL AFRICA CONSULTATION OF WOMEN THEOLOGIANs

Report by Rathie Selvaratnam

The All Africa Consultation of Women Theologians, Partners in the Community of Women and Men in Church and Society, was held in Ibadan, Nigeria, in September 1980. The Consultation met:-

1. to evaluate the role and contribution of African Women Theologians to the religious institutions and family life and national development of Africa.
2. to discuss in detail the concern expressed by church-women on the Ordination of Women.
3. to discuss in detail and analyse the content of present trends in theology at various institutions in order to recommend specific aspects of theological studies that are of special relevance to women.
4. to discover ways in which theological education can be used to foster total development in the community.

Thirty-five theologically trained women from twenty-one states of Africa, both English and French speaking, attended this Conference, with Consultants from Europe, Asia and U.S.A. Of the thirty-five women, some were pastors and ministers in parishes, chaplains in schools, lecturers and professors in Theology in the Universities of Africa and six of them had doctorates in Theology.

Papers were presented and discussed on:

- a) Women in the Church and Ministry - a Biblical Perspective.
- b) Participation of Women in the Church - Why not?
- c) Situational report of Women who are active in the Church.
- d) Men and Women - a People of God.
- e) Special Ministry of Women in the Church - a present situation in Europe.
- f) The Role of Women in the Church in Asia, with greetings from Australian Church Women.

In her keynote address, Dr (Mrs) Irene Ighodra, Dean of Theological Studies at the University of Ibadan said, "It seems strange to me, where the Christian Church is faced with different types of dilemma, due to tradition, the natural deep religious instinct of people and even society itself, the church has never

thought of using the immense specialised knowledge of women to help the modern woman in the modern world, her own life and all that is happening in the society around her.

Theology is a fundamental study of the Science which treats of God, His nature and attributes to His relations with man and the Universe. It is also the Science of things Divine. And why has this Science then, been regarded mainly fit for the study of males, and women hardly encouraged to study it? How is it that in the Christian Church, which is a worshipping community of people of like faiths and beliefs, the Church which believes in and practises the dignity of the worth of individuals, in its own ministry which is service to one's fellow man, woman is treated as a sub-species?

Women theologians form a valuable group that the Church can most profitably use, and the Church should be busy trying to make opportunities for them. Jesus' attitude to women calls for a close examination of the question 'What is the place of women in Jesus' teaching?' His encounter with them has shown in word as in practice, His belief in the equality of men and women."

In the "Decade of Development of Women" we pray that the particular gifts given to both men and women will be used to equip and nurture one another to grow into maturity and wholeness. Jesus Christ came so that both men and women may have life and have it in abundance, but if they do not have ample opportunity to have a fuller life, the promise of this fullness will not be realised. A wind of change is blowing, bringing about many changes in the fortunes of women in relation to the Church, so that the Church will truly reflect the Theology of Liberation.

This Consultation was followed by a World Council of Churches Consultation on "Towards a Fuller Community of Women and Men in the Church", when twenty African male theologians joined the consultation. The progress the Church in Africa has made is one for which we must be most thankful to God, as well as lead us who are in the churches in Europe, the Americas, Asia and Australia, to much prayer and soul searching.

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BERNARD PATRICK, Executive Secretary

(24/11/75)

AUSTRALIAN DELEGATES AT MANILA FOR THE SILVER JUBILEE WERE:

N.S.W. Mrs. Heather Stevens
Mrs. Marjorie Stanhope
Mrs. Marie McCann
Deaconess Mary Andrews

S.AUS. Mrs. Barbara Grealy

VIC. Mrs. Fran Downes
Deaconess Alfred
Miss Margaret Brumby

TAS. Mrs. Marie Price

ACWC CTE. MEMBER: Mrs. Rachel Cocks

PAST-PRESIDENT: Mrs. Rathie Selvaratnum

REPORT ON GRANT FROM THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE LEAST COIN

The grant of US\$2,000 received from the Fellowship of the Least Coin in November 1978 was not applied to the project proposed until September 1980.

Immediately following the grant in 1978 Mrs. Enid Udy, who had made the submission, left the staff of the Australian Council of Churches for a position with the Uniting Church. Her successor was unaware of the grant and it was brought to my notice late in 1979.

It has taken until May 1980 to find a means of developing a training program for migrant women, and the program adopted will now ensure that from the training experience of the initial person in the program, a long succession of migrant women will develop skills in dealing with the pressures of industrial employment in the Australian context.

The initial recipient of training is HELEN TAXIDOU, who has now begun work with the Workers Health Centre at Lidcombe, New South Wales. The project, as it develops will be reported upon by the supervisor, Jill Gutteridge, of the permanent staff of the Workers Centre. Reports will be evaluated by Thelma Skiller and Sandra Wilson of the staff of the Australian Council of Churches together with myself.

BERN STEVENS, Executive Secretary
(21/11/80)