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 World Mission Council

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Editorial

**WOMEN
 IN THE
 WORLD CHURCH**

This year the World Mission Council has focussed on Women in the World Church. The contributions of women to the church as a whole, the struggle of women within the church, and the challenges they face within society have given us plenty to think about.

We have heard inspiring women speak at our Women in the World Church conference, and have read about the work that is happening across the world to bring about gender justice. Congregations across Scotland have been using our resources to hear the stories of women in our partner churches, and to take their own steps towards gender equality.

This edition of WM Magazine includes the Easter Story from the perspective of women who work for partner churches and organisations across the world. We hear

about the hope of Easter in Syria, where there is war. We hear about the faith and resilience of the women in the Easter story, and of how the same qualities are found among women today.

The hope of Easter is a resounding theme throughout the magazine. Without hope, our journey towards justice and equality in the world cannot go on. This is why the Easter story is so important to Christians all over the world.

This edition of WM Magazine also looks at Side by Side, which is a growing global movement of people of faith who want to see gender justice become a reality across the world. On International Women's Day (8 March), we attended the launch of Side by Side Scotland's Faith in Gender Justice Exhibition.

There are resources being made, people taking practical action, and important conversations taking place. The event was inspiring, and made us realise that the World Church, together with people of all faiths, has an opportunity to be a powerful force for change towards gender justice.

We hope this edition of WM Magazine brings a new and interesting perspective to you this Easter.

Without hope, our journey towards justice and equality in the world cannot go on.

WOMEN AND CARE GIVING IN AFRICA: LESSONS FROM MARK 15:42-16:8



Rev. Lucy Wambui Waweru is a Minister at the Presbyterian Church of East Africa

Women make up 80% of the church membership in Kenya, and generally in Africa. This majority is not reflected in leadership and policy making circles. Will the Bible be allowed this Easter to 'speak' to these sometimes overburdened daughters of God, who run to Church for refuge and inspiration? Who will accompany, support, and encourage these women and girls who bear such great burdens in their communities?

It has been documented that women all over the world, and mainly in Sub Saharan Africa, bear the burden of care giving. They predominantly provide informal care for family members with chronic medical conditions or disabilities, including the elderly and adults with mental illnesses. Take HIV as an example; two thirds of caregivers are women. Traditional gender norms have contributed to ensure that women and girls become the first option for caregiving roles. Studies have shown

We can gratefully retell the story of the love, devotion, and respect that African women show to their families and to those who are suffering

that women experience greater mental and physical strain, greater caregiver-burden, and higher levels of psychological distress as a result of undertaking this role. This rather 'mandatory' role has been seen to impose psychosocial disruption in the lives of women.

The story of the three women in Mark 15:42-16:8 on one side celebrates the resilience, love, care, and nurturing gifts

of women, while on the other side poses a challenge on how to help relieve the overwhelming challenges women face in taking on duties such as caregiving. Many commentators of this passage only run through the resurrection story without necessarily empathising with the women in the story, and womenfolk in general. We note with appreciation that the women in the narrative did the best they could with what they had - just as many do in Africa. While they knew that they couldn't speak before the Sanhedrin in Jesus' defence; they could not appeal to Pilate, they could not stand against the crowds; they could not overpower the Roman guards, they chose to stay at the cross when the disciples had fled, to follow Jesus' body to the tomb, and prepare spices for his body. Even in the face of overwhelming challenges, the Roman guards and the huge rock in the tomb's doorway, they were determined to anoint Jesus' body as a sign of love, devotion and respect.

The testimony that grew from the resilience and silence of these women was always an invitation rather than coercion. The rather abrupt ending coupled with the silence and flight of these trembling and bewildered women in Mark's account gives us a chance to add our stories to the story of the loving saviour and of his followers. And yes - we can gratefully retell the story of the love, devotion, and respect that African women show to their families and to those who are suffering - even to the dying. The story of the three women in Mark read through the lenses of caregiving African women most importantly poses a challenge to the Church's mission in the 21st Century.



'When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.'
Mark 16:1-4 (NIV)

RELENTLESS WOMEN



Sashi Stephen is Director of the Women's Development Centre in Kandy, Sri Lanka

The Easter story is one that reflects unconditional love and sacrifice. Whilst we as Christians know the story by heart, we rarely focus on the minor details that make up the events leading to Easter.

What is unique about the story of Easter is the prominence given to the women who relentlessly followed Jesus in his journey. Mary, the mother of Jesus played an important role in Jesus' life as a mother and as a devout follower of Christ's teaching. She understood that her son had a higher calling and was with him till the last moment.

Her grief cannot be imagined as she knelt at the foot of the cross, but she knew deep in her heart that it was the purpose of God

All these women played a major role in Jesus' life, however none were given the proper recognition they deserved.

.....
that had to be fulfilled. Her devotion to him showed the unconditional love she held for her son.

In the same way, we see Mary Magdalene who was also a devout follower of Jesus, and was sometimes considered to be a disciple of Jesus. Her name is prominently mentioned in the gospel and her devotion to Jesus and his ministry is evident,



particularly between the time of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

Mary Magdalene, together with Mary the mother of Jesus, was present at Jesus' crucifixion and burial. She was the first to witness his resurrection. She was put in charge of the important duty of anointing the body of Jesus after the crucifixion. Prior to the crucifixion it was a woman named Mary who anointed the feet of Jesus with an expensive perfume. She received criticism from the disciples; however Jesus praised her anointing as he recognised purity and true repentance in her heart. All these women played a major role in Jesus' life, however none were given the proper recognition they deserved.

Likewise, God chose Pearl Stephen, founder of the Women's Development Centre in Sri Lanka. She was a woman of courage, and a devout follower of Christ, who looked into the needs of vulnerable and marginalised women and children. To give a voice to the voiceless, to show love and care to the abused and mistreated, and for those with special needs to stand on their feet. The Women's Development Centre in Sri Lanka strives to give hope to women despite their race, religion or cast; they are treated as human beings, created in the

likeness of God. What the world needs is care and love, and to recognise the value of a woman by appreciating her role as a mother, sister, wife and daughter, alongside her role as professional, carer, and decision maker, or whatever role she prefers to choose.

Jesus recognised the value of women as he placed them within instances of importance. God, through Jesus, recognised the role women play and the women in turn relentlessly followed him until the very end. Therefore this Easter my message is to show recognition and appreciation for the tireless work of the women in our lives, and to understand the important roles women play to fulfil God's will on earth.



The Women's Development Centre use creative, innovative and effective change initiatives to encourage self-reliance and provide equal opportunities for at risk and vulnerable women, youth, and children. Visit womendev.org for more information.

HE IS GOING AHEAD OF YOU



Rev. Eszter Karsay is the Senior Pastor of the Reformed Church in Budapest, Hungary

At Easter we meditate on women who accompanied Jesus and stayed present until the end, when Jesus was crucified and buried. Not everybody is able to bear such tragic experiences.

Mary, with other women, wanted to anoint the body but was alarmed by the shocking fact that Jesus was not in the tomb. Feeling helpless, powerless, and confused Mary could not believe her eyes until Jesus convinced her: He is risen. "Do not be afraid", "He is going ahead of you", "Peace be with you".

Resurrection is beyond our human mind. The women were full of feelings, mostly of fear and doubt, as well as longing to see Jesus. With inspiration and spiritual

intelligence they took the message in their hearts.

It is important to have emotional intelligence in everyday life for family, workplace, personal encounters and so on. But we also need something beyond that: spiritual intelligence to take in mystery, divine work and life beyond death.

Women were sent to be apostles to the apostles. "They said nothing to anyone" – says the evangelist. No one, but the disciples. Surely they could not keep silent about such a miracle! Perhaps others would not have believed the words of a woman anyway.

The Reformed Church in Hungary did not ordain women when I finished theological



studies. For six years I was excluded from serving Communion, and holding baptisms, weddings and funerals, and from wearing a preaching gown. I was among the first women to be ordained, but only in 1986 did I receive equal rights with male pastors. Throughout those years Easter stories encouraged us. It was women who met the risen Christ first. They were sent out with

Men might have been properly ordained on paper, but truly ordained pastors are the ones who have experienced sorrow, disparity, doubt, and suffering to get where they are

the good news to the male disciples. If God calls and sends, who can prevent us from becoming true pastors?

Jesus lived in a patriarchal society. He did not organise revolutions, but his divine freedom can liberate women from their second class position. He gave a lot to women around him, and let them discover human dignity.

Men might have been properly ordained on paper, but truly ordained pastors are the ones who have experienced sorrow, disparity, doubt, and suffering to get where they are, all the while being comforted by the living Christ.

In Hungary, a post-communist country, many tensions remain in individuals and communities. Anger and conflict are related to the fact that bad memories are long kept in silence, even among church members. Easter should be a time to recover: healing the wounds and memories of the past. We re-tell narratives, gather testimonies, and listen to those who suffer. We engage in the truth of Jesus' divine and sacred presence. This can begin the process of reconciliation, and can be a peace-building force, a source of healing for others.

We can only lead people on a spiritual journey which goes as far as we have gone. We cannot talk or model it beyond that. Jesus "the Wounded Healer" (Henri Nouwen) heals our wounds and memories. Jesus is moving ahead, and shows the path to the future.

ACT NOW...

To learn more about our partner churches visit:

www.churchofscotland.org.uk

THE EASTER PEACEMAKER



Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5.9)

Anyone who was involved with the recent visit of a group of peacemakers from South Sudan was left in no doubt of the urgency, the challenge and the risks involved in the work of peacemaking. Jesus himself recognised the importance of that task. Paul summarises the mission of Jesus as one of peacemaking, between God and us. "Therefore since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5.1). The Easter story is about the willingness of Jesus to lay down his life to make possible the renewed peace between us and God, a peace which his death and resurrection achieved. However the Bible is always realistic rather than naïve. Jesus didn't say "Admired are the peacemakers," "Respected are the peacemakers," or "Universally welcomed

are the peacemakers." Women and men around the world church know well that peacemaking can be a costly business, often misunderstood or misrepresented, yet ultimately worth the challenge. Jesus, our Easter peacemaker, sees something of himself in the work of those who challenge violence and injustice and work for reconciliation, when he says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

We can be peacemakers in our own homes, our own families, our own congregations and our own communities. And we can stand in solidarity with those women and men around the church in many situations who take risks for peace and work for peace, knowing that Jesus the peacemaker blesses those who take on the task.

PRAYER FOCUS:

God of peace,
by your son's dying and rising
we have peace with you. We
recognise the cost of that
peacemaking, and thank you
that Jesus paid that cost.
We pray for partners and friends
around the world working for
peace. Strengthen and encourage
those who challenge structures
of oppression, violence or
injustice; those who refuse to
allow past hatred to dictate
the future; and those for whom
peacemaking is costly.
Give us courage to be
peacemakers in our own
situations, and a willingness to
stand with those who work for
peace.
We bring our prayers in the name
of Jesus, our Easter peacemaker,
Amen.



NEWSFLASH:

This summer, the International Family Camp organised by the Church of Scotland and the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren will take place on 4 - 11 August at Carronvale House in Larbert.

If you are interested, contact:
agrahame@churchofscotland.org.uk

MISSION PARTNER PRAYER FOCUS



David and Mary Sinclair have recently moved to Prague to work with the

Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren. Pray:

1. That language lessons would go well
2. That friends will be made
3. An enjoyable and fulfilling start to their work

EASTER GIVES HOPE



Mary Mikhael works for the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon.

The season of Lent is over. Churches of all traditions consider this a time of reflection on the suffering of Jesus.

Jesus. Innocent, righteous and sinless. The one who healed the sick, who gave sight to the blind, who forgave sinners, who lifted up the lowly, who helped the marginalised regain dignity. He is crucified as a criminal. Death on the cross was considered the cruellest and most horrifying death, and a symbol of shame. Yet on the cross of Jesus, a sign saying "Jesus, King of the Jews" was hung. Indeed, Jesus is the King of all Nations (Whether Pilate recognised it or not)!

Can love and forgiveness prevail?

On the cross, Jesus prayed for those who were shouting "Crucify him, crucify him!" He prayed "Father forgive them". Thanks be to God that the cross was not the end. Rather the door to hope. The meaning of the cross in Syria, as never before, has become a symbol for daily experiences of so many families who lost loved ones, some of whom were killed

in cruel ways. Can love and forgiveness prevail?

Yes it can. We can never, and should never, think of the cross without the resurrection. This is what gives us hope after the tragedies of death, destruction and war over the last seven years.

The human tragedies in Syria will come to an end. Women, men, children will stop suffering and will move from hopelessness to hopefulness. We must confess that it is not easy to live in hope, as whenever we see a glimpse of light that violence will stop, violence breaks out in new ways. The violence that recently took place in in Damascus and its suburbs provoke the deepest fear.

Universities that are attended by thousands of students and faculties had to close, as Damascus is being shelled blindly. Schools have been attacked as children come and go. Many are killed as they go about their daily lives.

In this Season of Lent, as never before, some of our Churches are closing and Church activities have been cancelled for fear of the shells hitting Damascus. The old Christian areas of Damascus have been targeted, many have been killed or injured, causing much destruction and hurt. Can love and forgiveness prevail? Can hope be maintained?

Yes it can. The Cross is no more a curse, rather the sign of hope and life everlasting. Indeed this is our faith that the resurrection is final and complete. And yes faith is a continuous struggle, but Lent leads us to celebrate the resurrection.

A Place at the Table



The continuing conflict in Syria has claimed the lives of thousands of people and left millions homeless and without the basic necessities of life. Throughout the war, our partners, the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL) have been walking alongside people, supporting them and providing humanitarian help.

You can get involved in 'A Place at the Table' to help NESSL as they reach out to the refugees to provide food, shelter, hygiene, water and fuel supplies.

You can help make a difference, it's as easy as setting 'A Place at the Table' and giving the money you would have spent on that extra meal to help feed a family in Syria.

ACT NOW...

For more information about 'A Place at the Table', visit:
www.churchofscotland.org.uk

A JOURNEY TO JUSTICE



Dr Isabel Phiri

Side by Side is a movement for gender equality. It is a movement of people of faith, who recognise that women and men are equal.

The journey towards gender equality can feel long, and full of obstacles. But we are not alone in our struggle. There are inspiring women all over the world, and throughout history, whose stories can give us strength to persevere. I'm sure that the women who stood and watched as Jesus died on the cross felt that they were about to embark on an exhausting journey of grief. Their teacher and friend was dead, and their cause was lost. However, instead of retreating back to their

homes to grieve, they were persistent in their care for Jesus. They took what seemed to be a small step towards doing the right thing, and ended up in the middle of one of the most symbolic and revolutionary moments in religious history. They were the first to see that Jesus had risen. Side by Side gives us an opportunity to take a step towards doing what is right on our journey towards gender equality. On International Women's Day, Side by Side Scotland launched their exhibition on Faith in Gender Justice. During the launch, Kathy

Galloway (then Chair of the Side by Side group), stated that "we are never going away. We are persistent."

The exhibition is a great example of women who are persistent in their faith, and in their willingness to do the right thing. There are examples of women who are campaigning for gender justice, who are living gender justice through leadership, and who are actively supporting women on the ground who are refugees, affected by gender based violence, or HIV.

Among these examples are two women who are well known to the World Mission Council. Rev Nosheen Khan, who is the Principal of the Gujranwala Theological Collage in Pakistan, felt called to ministry at a young age. At the time the Church of Pakistan did not ordain women. This did not stop Nosheen. She took the steps she needed to take for ordination, and is now a Reverend. She is also the first woman to be the Principal at the Gujranwala Theological Collage, and is determined not to be the last.

Dr Isabel Phiri is Deputy General Secretary for Public Witness and Diakonia at the World Council of Churches. Starting her journey was not easy. She has experienced violent attacks for the findings of her research on rape and sexual harassment on campus in the University of Malawi, and



Rev Nosheen Khan

was threatened with excommunication from her church after 'inciting' staff to seek gender justice. This did not deter Isabel. She was persistent. A Centre for Gender Studies has since been established at the University of Malawi, and Isabel is able to bring justice issues to the international community in her role with the World Council of Churches.

The journey towards gender justice is long and difficult. But the World Church is in an excellent position to take significant steps in the right direction. We can join with movements of faith such as Side by Side, which are stirring people across the world to act on Gender Justice. We can push for justice in our own church communities, and learn from our sisters and brothers across the world. We can be persistent.



**SIDE
BY
SIDE**

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For more information, visit:
sidebysidegender.org or
christianaid.org.uk/scotland

Next Edition: Interfaith.



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