



# A D D E N D U M

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FOR CSW- 53

ON THE THEME OF "THE EQUAL SHARING  
OF RESPONSIBILITIES BETWEEN WOMEN  
AND MEN, INCLUDING CAREGIVING IN  
THE CONTEXT OF HIV/AIDS"

## THIS ADDENDUM INCLUDES:

- An Introduction to the theme
- A collection of seven devotions written from around the world
- The official statement of Ecumenical Women submitted to the UN Commission on the Status of Women

## INTRODUCTION

Before we approached the theme of the CSW-53 of caregiving, we sent out a survey to members of the Ecumenical Women network. Like the UN member states who agreed to discuss this theme, we must admit that caregiving was not a subject to which we had ever given much priority. When we began to study the issue of caregiving we realized it has always been the work of women – and the work of the church. The act of giving care is all around us: mothers care for their children, nurses care for the sick or elderly, babysitters care for children. Additionally, in many countries, faith-based organizations run a significant if not majority of health care systems.

We received 50 responses from women connected to faith-based programs from around the world. The replies reaffirmed what we already

knew, that the majority of caregivers, (90%) are women. Women are often seen as the primary care givers within the family and the community, they care sacrificially and wholeheartedly, and they always think of others before them. Though some of them are HIV-positive themselves, they care for their husbands and children more than they care for themselves. They work to provide for their families, are willing to face all challenges, and struggle to balance care for immediate family, extended family, and work.

Men are capable of the same type of care, although some cultural norms/society does not allow that to be the case; many always think that caring ministry is for women and not for them, they are too dependent on their wives, mothers, girlfriends, sisters, etc. Men ought to share the responsibility of caring for those in our communities and families who are experiencing and/or are affected by HIV and AIDS. Even just a few men help, and their role can be very significant.

Stigma and discrimination are still some of the biggest challenges for people living with HIV and AIDS and their families. There is still a fear of HIV and AIDS among many community

members and this makes it very hard for the affected or infected person to seek medical help or counseling. Many are isolated and lonely. Sad stories were shared like the story of a mother whose 28-year-old son arrived home with AIDS. She cared for him for over a year, and no one visited her at all until he died.

Respondents suggested:

- All should be encouraged to assist women in lifting up this burden. Men should do more than they are doing at present, and expectation of men's roles must change. Often paternal leave/caretaking is the least-supported notion in society. This must change in order to assist in women's concerns.
- Recognition of the woman's unique position as caretaker of children or parents. Government should at least consider what are fair work practices, minimum wage, compensation, etc.
- Different or better health care system (medicines).
- The church and people of faith should speak out and act, caring for those in our communities who are the most vulnerable.
- More awareness programs, trainings, exposure trips, talks and sermons by churches, leaders, schools, universities, etc.

- Emotional support and education on health and treatment and skills training for the incoming generation.

In closing, one respondent shared a Bible story they felt most explained caregiving, the story of Moses who received help from Aaron and Hur when his arms grew weary. (Exodus 17:10) While Moses held up the staff, Israel would win. When his arms grew weary, the enemy seemed to have the victory. The solution was to sit Moses on a rock while Aaron and Hur helped hold up his arms. The victory went to the Hebrews. We need people to come alongside us and help us hold up our arms.

### **Editor:**

Jessica Hawkinson  
*Presbyterian Church USA*

### **Contributing Writer:**

Christine Mangale  
*Lutheran Office for World Community*

*Contributions collected by: Rev. Kathleen Stone,  
Chaplain for the Church Center for the United Nations*



## 7 DEVOTIONS: SCRIPTURAL REFLECTIONS ON CAREGIVING

It is sometimes easy to forget among the shocking statistics and frenzied pace of advocacy at the United Nations that we need Sabbath and moments of silence to reflect on the possibility of compassion, justice, and peace that God has in store for us. In the quiet of an evening, or as you leave this place, be accompanied not only by the assurance that you are blessed, but by the knowledge that we never travel alone in our efforts. These devotions are rich with both Scripture and stories from real people who are infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. These prayers are worship, but they are also questions about identity and how we share power in our societies.

# 1. BAPTIZED AS ONE, SHARING RESPONSIBILITIES



*About the author: Michel Ngoy Mulunda is a council member of the Lutheran World Federation program committee of Ecumenical Affairs and the president of the youth of the Lutheran Communion in Central and Eastern Africa from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Congo.*

## BIBLICAL TEXT:

*Galatians 3: 27-28*

*As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*

## REFLECTION:

“Positive masculinities” are practices that men could incorporate into their lives whereby women would be an equal partner in everything, sharing responsibilities without any discrimination. This expansion of mind and role would make it impossible for the woman to be separated from building a peaceful life with him as his companion. In such a life, both male and female are equal human beings. Paul argues convincingly for equality in the Galatian Christian community. Membership in this new community does not depend on one’s

gender, social status, or ethnic tie and effectively eliminates all discrimination based on gender and ethnicity. This text can be used to counter gender, ethnic, and race stereotypes within a believing community.

*“We are baptized into Christ as a person, irrespective of our social status, so that just as humanity of the male is taken into the Christ so is the humanity of the female. There is no sexual distinction in the Trinity, but qualities labeled feminine and masculine are all manifested in Christ Jesus who is the image par excellence of God.”*

Since this egalitarian Christian self-understanding did away with all male privilege in religion, class and caste, it allowed not only Gentiles and slaves, but also women, to exercise leadership functions within the missionary movement.

Careful Biblical interpretation must seek to reinstate women, as Jesus Christ did, to their full status as “total persons,” whole and worthy, being created in the image of God, and as fully accepted members of the body of Christ. They are not separate objects. This is an example of “positive masculinity.” Our interpretation of the Scripture will have to draw on such theological resources as the incarnation of Jesus Christ if it is to impact the quest for the liberation of

women. It will have to declare that God’s love for humanity was revealed in Jesus Christ, and that Jesus Christ came to the world as a human being to creation. Thus, a true biblical interpretation should declare that:

*Through Jesus an intimate relationship was established between God and humanity (Ephesians 5). By Jesus’ incarnation, women and men were freed from servitude to sin and death, and human life was fully divinized.*

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Scripture should be interpreted in such a way that it equips women to liberate themselves from merely accepting the status society attributes to them. In this regard, attitudes must be changed in accordance with the message of Christ that new wine cannot be put in old wineskins. The Church should be a living example of a free community of women and men, a community truly set free in Christ.

## PRAYER:

God of justice and compassion we ask for your transforming and healing presence for women, men, and youth who suffer from social injustice and leadership discrimination. For those who are detained, violated, or harassed for speaking truth to power, let us pray:

**Lord, hear our prayer.**

Lord, protect and strengthen the efforts of the courageous women who dare to speak up and the courageous men who dare to venture new ways to implement gender power in working conditions and equal responsibilities between women and men in the leadership matters within societies at all levels. Let us pray:

**Lord, hear our prayer.**

## 2. LEARNING TO EXPRESS MASCULINITY



*About the author: Doreen Boyd is the Regional Missionary to the Caribbean, Women's Division, About the author: Doreen Boyd is the Regional Missionary to the Caribbean, Women's Division, General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church.*

### BIBLICAL TEXT:

*Luke 8:1-3*

*Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.*

### REFLECTION:

This text addresses the fact that while Jesus and his twelve male disciples went about his ministry "preaching the Good news about the Kingdom of God," he was also accompanied by "women who were healed of evil spirits and diseases"

and others who "used their own resources" to help in the ministry.

That Jesus allowed women to take an active part in his ministry was not the norm, since most women of that time occupied an insignificant place in society, and his action must have "raised eyebrows" among his followers. But it is not surprising that once women personally experienced Jesus' gift of healing and acceptance, they were ready to break with tradition and follow him. Jesus did not turn them away; rather, he encouraged and taught them, thus establishing women not only as recipients of but as participants in his redeeming work.

To his women followers, Jesus personified positive masculinity. He was upright, compassionate, gentle, understanding, and sensitive to the deepest yearnings of the human heart. Some of the most loved stories of Jesus' life are those which involve contact with women; e.g., a despised Samaritan woman, not daring to mingle with polite society, goes to fetch water in the heat of the day and encounters Jesus who, breaking the cultural norms of religion and sex, engages her in conversation and theological reflection, to the amazement of his disciples.

In the Caribbean where I live and work, providing gender training is a high priority since violence

against women is still socially acceptable, the prevalence of HIV and AIDS is second only to sub-Saharan Africa, and women between the ages of 24-45 are mostly affected. In these training workshops entitled "Created in God's Image: From Hierarchy to Partnership," both sexes participate together with a focus on the role of men in achieving gender equality and the eradication of domestic violence. At one workshop, on the final day, the men were so moved by what they had learned about positive ways of expressing masculinity that they asked for time to pray for healing. This was followed by a spontaneous and very emotional moment of the men hugging the women and asking for personal and collective forgiveness for violence against women in general. It was a very powerful moment of grace and reconciliation.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Jesus' graciousness towards women can be seen as a corrective to an untenable situation that still exists today. Ask yourself what actions, theologically, politically and practically will you and your church community/ecumenical partners take to ensure that the fullness of life in Jesus takes fresh expression in the churches' mission for women's equality and reduction in male dominance in Church and society?

This is not an option, for to bring about God's reign on earth, the Gospel imperative for social transformation is as critical as is its invitation to personal conversion.

### PRAYER:

Father, we thank you for the knowledge and belief that our wounded world may be healed and made whole by the love of Christ. Empower us we pray, equally as men and women, to take responsibility for caregiving, both spiritually and physically, of those who need care, for you have called and commissioned us to serve in your Kingdom. Grant us grace to remain faithful to this call in Jesus' name. Amen

### 3. TOWARD A NEW PARADIGM OF LOVE



*About the author: Nora Liliana Montaña serves the Methodist Church in Colombia and holds a Bachelor's degree in history.*

#### BIBLICAL TEXT:

*Romans 5:5*

*And hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*

#### REFLECTION:

I know a woman who had a good job and shared a home with her 6-year-old daughter. One day, she discovered that she had HIV, which made her life go into free-fall. When people found out at work that she had AIDS, they immediately threw her out, leading to very difficult times for her and her daughter. She was not able to pay for medicine and food and felt lonely. She then found someone to keep her company. However, the moment that this person found out that she was pregnant, she was left alone again. This person had AIDS, too. Even against these odds, this woman was able to

stand up and cover some of her economic needs. With the help of her children and friends who had not run away after finding out about her status, she created the foundation "Lila Mujer" in the Agua Blanca District in Cali, Colombia, where she takes care of women with HIV or AIDS, provides them with life skills and struggles with them to avoid discrimination and uphold their civil rights. This woman clung to life and regardless of her condition, fought for herself and others who were in similar conditions.

Romans 5:5 speaks about God's love poured among us through his Spirit. This love that inhabits our hearts, motivates us every day to serve and help those who need it most. We must take care of those with HIV and AIDS and support them without chauvinistic barriers or racial prejudices. Jesus Christ poured his love among us so that we can follow his example of love for humanity, struggle for respect, and gender equity. God provides us with love to do good deeds, but within his justice provides us with skills and abilities so that we can support ourselves. In order to do so, we must uphold our

rights, given that Leviticus 19:13 tells us: "you shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning." The person that takes care of an AIDS patient also needs economic support and social and psychological assistance to help provide a better service.

Jesus Christ broke with the paradigms of Jewish society when he healed the sick during the day of rest and when he did not allow the stoning of a prostitute. It is also important that we start to change the current paradigms that rule the social, cultural and political systems in our communities and will not allow women to enjoy equal rights.

#### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Create a women's network that provides capacity-building about rights and ways to uphold them in political processes while leading and participating in the transformation of the economic and socio-cultural structures in their communities so that they can demand respect for their rights.

#### PRAYER:

Beloved Jesus Christ, thank you for your love poured over each one of us. Provide us with the opportunity to serve our fellow brothers and sisters, as you taught us with your word. Amen.

## 4. REMEMBERING OUR NEED FOR SABBATH



*About the author: Rev. Kathleen Stone is the chaplain for the Church Center for the United Nations and is from the United States.*

### BIBLICAL TEXT:

*Luke 10:38-42*

*Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. 39She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. 40But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." 41But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; 42there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."*

### REFLECTION:

As the chaplain at the Church Center for the United Nations, I have had the opportunity to see most of the biblical reflections that have come in through the work of Ecumenical Women around the thematic of this year's Commission on the

Status of Women, "The equal responsibility of men and women, especially in caretaking around HIV and AIDS." I have found them to be wonderful. But, surprising to me, no one has chosen the passage where Jesus visits Martha and Mary. So I determined I would do so.

Many religious persons believe women to be the ones God has created to take care of things in the home; religious values around the world seem to relegate women to the role of caretaking. And Christian women that I know have always used the story of Martha and Mary to divide ourselves up — talking about whether I'm more like Martha or Mary (how typical it is for those who are discriminated against to divide themselves off from one another!) But suddenly, the scales have fallen from my eyes. Jesus' affirmation that Mary, as a woman, has a right to get out of the kitchen is outrageous and its inclusion in scripture in the Gospel and in the Bible in the year 325, is even more amazing! That the reclining Jesus gave permission to Mary to independently explore her connection to Jesus, her unique call above and beyond the social roles of her day,

to hear the call out of the kitchen, to be about the faithful work in different ways than limited by gender? As the first one to the tomb and the first to witness the resurrection, what would have happened if she didn't take the dangerous road to the tomb by herself? If she had listened to the call of society that she had breakfast to cook, clothes to wash, firewood to collect, and floors to sweep? This story about women in the kitchen actually validates a woman who is NOT fixing the feast! Outrageous!

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

For God's sake, listen to the call today in your own life. Not to self-centeredness or laziness, but to listen to the call of the voice of God which gives us joy and challenge, which sends us on dangerous journeys to empty tombs guarded by soldiers, and challenges us to do what's on our hearts.

### PRAYER:

Holy and gracious God, you have given the world to us. Give us strength and courage to hear what's on our hearts, to do what we hear, to love what we love, to see the responsibilities we have from you as unlike the responsibilities placed on us by the world according to our gender. God, help us with whatever ways we caretake today whether by listening at the feet of loved ones or hustling about in the kitchen, the workroom, the chapel, the soup kitchen, the halls of our governments, or the village squares. Amen.

## 5. WE CAN NEVER TURN OUR BACK ON THE SICK



*About the author: Facia Boyenoh Harris writes from the National Student Christian Commission in Liberia.*

### BIBLICAL TEXT:

*Mark 12:30-31*

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” 31The second is this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.*

### REFLECTION:

The only reason why a man or woman would choose to help or give care to those isolated and stigmatized as a result of their sickness is because they love God and neighbor. I would like to look at the passage above and consider its application with an example from the New Testament: the example of the woman who is hemorrhaging (Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-47).

This is a story of a woman who for 12 years suffered an incurable sickness. Not only had she spent all her money on medical bills, but her condition had gotten worse. However, this same woman had such strong faith that she made a demand of the power of God, which brought total and immediate deliverance.

Physical, social and economic constraints often limit the ability of people living with HIV and AIDS in meeting basic needs, but as Christians we must be able to witness Christ Jesus in such situations. As community members, we are a valuable source of support for people living with HIV and AIDS. Although we may know little about the types of physical, social and/or economic support we can provide or how to mobilize this support, the Holy Bible has the words and inspiration and hope we need to give to a person living with HIV/AIDS.

Jesus never turns the sick away; the woman with the issue of blood for 12 years sought medical attention, but to no avail. It was her faith through the healing power and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ that made all things to work together for

good. Over 40 million people are living with HIV and AIDS; this disease is not a punishment from God! We live in a broken, fallen world, and sadly, sickness and death are a part of our lives. If God began handing out sickness for our sins, most of us would be dead by tomorrow. Many people have HIV because something terrible was done to them or by them; violence and conflict, poverty and gender inequality has plagued our communities.

It is our responsibility as followers of Christ to spread the good news of God by caring for the sick and by telling them God loves them so much that he send his son to die on Calvary to save our sins that we have life and have it more abundantly. People living with HIV are God’s children; the love we show them will help them live longer and better lives. They need our encouragement in their faith in Christ so that by faith they can also experience the healing power of Jesus Christ in their body, spirit, soul, and mind.

### PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, you have commanded us to love you and then to love our neighbors. We cannot do this on our own, for your word says it is not by might nor by power but by your spirit. So we ask for your grace as joint heirs in your kingdom to show love and compassion to those who are sick. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

## 6. WOMAN, GREAT IS YOUR FAITH, IT TAKES COURAGE TO SEEK HELP



*About the author: Gladys Beatriz Saiquita is a sister from the Good Shepherd Sisters and is a teacher and missionary in Mozambique.*

### BIBLICAL TEXTS:

*Matthew 15: 21-28*

*Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.*

*Matthew 10:7-10*

*As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food.*

### REFLECTION:

In the first text we come across an unbeliever who, along with being a woman, is a foreigner. Yet this woman courageously trespasses both gender discrimination and geographical borders to seek healing for her daughter who is in a terrible condition. She hears about Jesus, a Jewish prophet. At first Jesus seems not to pay attention to her. Despite Jesus' inattention and the voices of those who are gathered, shouting, "Send her away ... she is making all this noise!" she continues to make her case known. Jesus is challenged by this unnamed woman. "I have been sent only to the lost sheep of Israel!" and "It isn't right to take the children's food and throw to the dogs." But she insisted further. "Even the dogs eat the leftovers that fall from their masters' table." Jesus praises her great faith and her daughter is cured. I see women who, like this woman from the text, go out overcoming all kinds of barriers and courageously seek help.

In particular, I have in mind an elderly Muslim mother whose daughter is currently undergoing an antiretroviral treatment. She saw me passing by and stopped me on my way back home. She asked me to come and see her daughter. I saw the face of this mother and my heart felt for her. I went into her house. There was a young mother of two

children lying on her bed. They did not know what she suffered from. She had been in hospital for a long time but there was not much change. I went back to the hospital and inquired about her. "She is HIV-positive and her husband is in the same condition as well as their younger daughter, who is seven years old." Soon after, the husband died and the young lady continued struggling to overcome her sickness. The elderly mother continues to look after her daughter and her grandchild.

The second passage from scripture upon which I'd like to reflect shows Jesus sending his disciples out to preach the Good News that the Kingdom of God is near. He then tells them to heal those who suffer from dreaded skin diseases. Men in my country are commissioned to bring healing to the suffering people. Within HIV campaigns there have been always a huge number of young men committed to hold workshops as well as to accompany the sick people. In our neighboring villages there are a good number of volunteer health workers committed to fighting HIV and AIDS.

My experience is that men are more involved in the outside world, running here and there to overcome suffering while women become more committed to the personal care of sick people. This is my experience in Malatane, Angoche District, Nampula Province, in Mozambique where I live and struggle to overcome poverty and sickness among the people.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Bringing AIDS under control will require overcoming the devastating barriers to access that take the form of stigma, discrimination, gender inequality, and other human rights violations. It will require overcoming the new injustices created by AIDS, such as the orphaning of generations of children and the stripping of human and institutional capacities. These are extraordinary challenges that demand extraordinary responses.

### PRAYER:

Most loving God of Mercy and Compassion,  
We come to you once again  
Seeking wholeness and healing.  
Lay your hands gently upon us.  
May your Holy Spirit comfort us and strengthen our will to remain close to you when suffering feels at home in our lives.  
Let us never be separated from your love, for we put all trust in you.  
And thank you Lord for right now you have listened to our prayer.  
Glory to you, Source of all Being, Eternal Word and Holy Spirit,  
as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

## 7. SHE IS ONE WHO KNOWS



*About the author: Rev. Catherine Knott is a Presbyterian pastor from the United States.*

### BIBLICAL TEXT:

*Matthew 26: 6-13*

*Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, "Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor." But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."*

### REFLECTION:

A gathering takes place in the town of Bethany. It is a gathering of Jesus, of his disciples, of his chosen few. The gathering appears insignificant,

until, as in many of the Gospels' movements, an uninvited woman appears. She is unnamed, unknown. A grimace comes upon the face of the practical and rational Judas who is seated in the gathering. "Who asked her to interrupt?" he wonders to himself.

Suddenly, a rash and lavish act is performed. The woman takes a milk-white alabaster jar, and in humility and homage, pours out the contents of sweet perfume onto the feet of Christ. She is washing him as fit for a coronation, as fit for a burial. Indignation sweeps the room. "That is costly! What a foolish waste!" the voice cries. Judas is ignited. How absurd she is. A lower, incompetent woman, engaged in such a show! Such frivolity. "That money could be spent on the poor!" he cries. "Stop!" Jesus retorts. "Do not trouble her ... what she has done will be told in remembrance of her." Of all the disciples, Judas is heralded for his logical choices and appropriate conclusions. However, his civilized, practical and imperialistic perspectives only lead him to counter the movement of his Master. He betrays his friend because of his ultimate

hopelessness. He scorns the woman because of his lack of imagination.

The woman at Jesus' feet does not lack imagination, love, or humility. On the contrary, her sense of vision enables her to have eyes that see and ears that hear in the face of a community seeking only conventional wisdom and the façade of a revolution. Jesus sees her devotion. She will be remembered for her faith. She is one who knows — she intuitively grasps the real costs of the Kingdom. In that moment, she remains the lowly among the company, unwanted, unimportant. Though not surprisingly, in Christ's kingdom, the lowly are exalted. Like the homeless, unmarried mother Mary or the women who were scorned when they proclaimed Christ's resurrection, the world's reaction is not what matters. In the eyes of our Creator, all women and men are fit to be disciples, and humanity is charged with the commission to follow Christ. Our model as Christians is to seek that woman's faith and hope in the good news of the Gospel, and to shun the nihilism voiced in Judas' outcry. We must listen to that woman — she is one who knows.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Take some time today to sit still and do absolutely nothing, for a whole five minutes. Sit comfortably but do not be disturbed by your surroundings. Do not think of the emails you have to write or the people who are dependent on you for tasks throughout the day. Breathe in God's goodness, and do nothing else. Be faithful; do not depend on yourself to know what is best. Be thankful, and take in the lavish love of Christ. You are loved.

### PRAYER:

Lord of all things, in you I have all that I need, in you I find my true meaning. Let me see with new eyes and hear with clarity. Let me breathe in your love, and know that your Spirit is with me always. Amen.

# ECONOMIC & SOCIAL COUNCIL

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN FIFTY-THIRD SESSION

## ABOUT THE STATEMENT

Every year the members of Ecumenical Women write a joint statement responding to the Commission on the Status of Women theme. To do this we conduct research and review existing church documents related to the issue. We then collectively write a statement such as this one, which is used in our advocacy with governments during the CSW. We submit the statement to the UN in November, and it becomes an official UN document, published and translated in the six languages of the UN in time for the Commission in February.

United Nations E/CN.6/2009/NGO/46

**2-13 March 2009**

*Item 3 (a) (i) of the provisional agenda*

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS.**

Statement submitted by the Anglican Consultative Council, Association of Presbyterian Women Aotearoa New Zealand, Church Women United, Church World Service, United Methodist Church General Board of Global Ministries, Presbyterian Church USA, The Lutheran World Federation, The Salvation Army, World Council of Churches, World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, World Student Christian Federation, World Young Women's Christian Association, United Methodist Church General Board of Church & Society, non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

## STATEMENT

Partners for Change: Faith-based Responses to Gender Inequality, Caregiving and HIV

1. The members of Ecumenical Women welcome the concerns of the 53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women: "The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving, in the context of HIV/AIDS." The fact that nearly 90% of caregiving falls to women exposes that there is no equal sharing of responsibility between men and women anywhere in the world. We congratulate the CSW for raising this theme that demands attention and policy response. As millions of people die, women are at the bedsides of the sick. This act of mercy takes women away from their livelihoods and providing for their children, creating a tragic cycle of poverty and vulnerability.
2. We write this statement presenting ourselves as partners in the solution to creating a more equitable society between women and men that is free from AIDS. Grounded in communities around the world, faith-based organizations are uniquely poised to respond to HIV and AIDS at all levels. As organizations that were the founders and are the practitioners of health care systems, we have the responsibility to share accurate information and train caregivers. While we continue to provide care, it is foremost the government's responsibility to provide health care for its people. We acknowledge that in
3. The pandemic demands bold and creative approaches, which must recognize the reality of power and gender roles which have contributed to the disempowerment of women. Gender equality must be realized to stop the victimization of women. We recognize that as religious organizations we have a role in creating the cultures that work to redefine gender roles and responsibilities.
4. We raise up and affirm the commitments of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Declaration of Commitment of the 2001 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS, and the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS. We continue to call for governments to implement the commitments made in these declarations.
5. The gravity of the pandemic has helped expose systemic issues that foster injustice and multiply the loss of life, including stigma, gender inequality, poverty, unemployment, unjust trade policies, racism, violence and conflict. Tackling these issues alone will not solve the crisis. We must adopt intersectoral approaches which ensure the protection of human rights, reproductive rights, legal rights, women's empowerment and economic justice. A gender sensitive response to AIDS must invest in changing social, cultural, and economic factors that put women and girls at risk. Investing in women and girls includes

many cases churches have contributed to the spread of stigma and misinformation about HIV and AIDS, undermining prevention efforts and inflicting additional suffering.

allocating flexible and adequate funds to organizations that reach women and girls, providing them with appropriate services and ensuring they have equal opportunities.

#### **OVERCOMING STIGMA FOR COMPREHENSIVE RESPONSE**

6. We cannot adequately address HIV and AIDS without first overcoming the barriers of fear and shame. The effect of stigma on HIV-positive persons and their families cannot be overstated. Stigma can mean that family members care for the sick alone, unable to seek help because of shame, or that people do not seek their diagnosis because they are afraid of being cast out of their community. Women and girls disproportionately experience the effects of stigma and discrimination, but everyone affected and infected by HIV must have their human rights protected.

#### **WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND THAT GOVERNMENTS:**

- Implement the commitments made at previous intergovernmental meetings, especially the Beijing Platform for Action, the Declaration of Commitment of the 2001 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS, and the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS.
- Establish policy priorities that adequately provide access to care for HIV-positive people.
- Ensure the involvement of HIV-positive

people in every aspect of program planning, execution and evaluation.

- Ensure that national policies and responses include analysis of their impact on women and girls.
- Demonstrate solidarity with HIV-positive persons through public actions.
- Outlaw discrimination based on gender and HIV status.

#### **ADDRESSING SYSTEMS OF GENDER INEQUALITY**

7. Women often have less status and access to education, health care, and economic security than men, which affects their ability to protect themselves from infection. Many cannot say “no” or negotiate the use of condoms because they fear they will be divorced or that their husband or other male partner will respond violently. The practice of child marriage renders girls more vulnerable to contracting HIV. Violence against women is a significant human rights violation and public health problem in every country in the world.

#### **WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND THAT GOVERNMENTS:**

- Emphasize and respond to the growing feminization of AIDS nationally, regionally and internationally.
- Promote gender equality (with both male and female perspectives) in

leadership training that addresses power relations between the sexes.

- Create programs that create a culture of safety for women and girls, including in partnership with men and boys.
- Implement educational models that challenge domination and teach new patterns of male sexual responsibility and nurturing masculinities.
- Promote changes in the gendered division of domestic tasks and achieve a balance of caring responsibilities.
- Promote laws that punish the perpetrators of violence against women, especially rape, and ensure training of police, lawyers and policy makers in how to uphold these laws.
- Empower women to participate, thus realizing their human rights to become themselves agents for change.

#### **CAREGIVING AT HOME AND IN THE COMMUNITY**

8. Millions of women care for their family and community members as they suffer; in Africa, a silent army of female volunteers cares for the sick. Some are trained as community health workers or birth attendants, while others are simply responding to immediate needs. Where hospitals are not available, faith-based organizations frequently fill in the gaps, providing everything from food to

support groups and last rites. Most caregivers receive little or no financial support, even for necessary medical supplies or transportation expenses. This burden frequently results in an inability to pay for family expenses such as food or school fees, causing girls to withdraw from school to provide care and/or lost family income, increasing their risk of sexual exploitation and HIV.

#### **WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND THAT GOVERNMENTS:**

- Recognize the magnitude and the implications of unpaid care work carried out by women.
- Encourage the creation of innovative local and national responses to remunerate caregivers.
- Include providing food as part of local response strategies.
- Increase resources for care programs in the home and at the local level.
- Study the burden of care on young people and provide specific support for young caregivers.
- Ensure free primary and secondary education for girls and boys.

#### **STRENGTHENING HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS**

9. Many women who were first at the bedside of HIV-positive persons are occupying those beds today. When women are ill, men do not

always take on the same responsibilities. In communities heavily affected by HIV, services are stretched more than ever. Women are often the last to receive healthcare, and HIV-positive women often face more discrimination when trying to obtain treatment, particularly reproductive health services. Five out of six people who need anti-retroviral treatment do not receive it. Access to medicine is prevented by high costs and inadequate training of health professionals, and unfair global trade rules hinder distribution. We urge governments to scale up access to antiretroviral medicines and overcome trade barriers, including distributing generic drugs. Profit motives should not override the urgent humanitarian need for readily available, safe, and affordable drugs.

**WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND THAT GOVERNMENTS:**

- Promote closer partnerships with civil society, faith-based organizations, the United Nations, and organizations of HIV-positive people, to increase capacity for care and support.
- Ensure that safe, effective, affordable medicines are widely available to alleviate suffering and extend life.
- Promote integrated healthcare that includes treatment and access to anti-retroviral therapy, taking into account local demographics and the

feminization of the pandemic.

**INCREASING RESOURCES FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION**

10. It is becoming clear that HIV is not only a health issue; it is one of the biggest threats to development and security in the world. The ramifications of HIV and AIDS are particularly grave for societies where the extended family serves as the system for social security for the elderly, those who are ill and orphans. AIDS compounds the strain on public institutions and resources while undermining traditional safety nets like the family. In nations with high HIV prevalence, there is a strong correlation with decreased development capacity because the workforce has been decimated. Further weakened by the burden of national debt, these nations need urgent access to affordable treatment. In some cases, structural adjustment policies have systematically decreased spending on social sectors while military spending has continued to rise. As a result, women and children experience diminished access to basic health and education services.

**WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND THAT GOVERNMENTS:**

- Continue efforts for relief of the illegitimate debt of highly indebted countries to make sure that a significant proportion of the released funds are used for strengthening health systems and HIV and AIDS response.

- Monitor national resource allocations and distribution to ensure that they benefit HIV and AIDS interventions, including community monitoring systems to avoid corruption.
- Protect budget allocations to critical social sectors including institutionalizing gender responsive budgeting.
- Undertake national analysis of women’s contributions in caregiving and its role in the economy.
- Review resource allocations for gender equality targets in poverty reduction strategies.
- Prevention
- Fund and resource community-based programs delivering and promoting education, prevention, counseling and testing, and life skills to men and women.
- Fund and promote economic self-sufficiency programs.
- Increase investments in the research and development of microbicides and the female condom.
- Affirm the right of men and women, especially young people, to have access to comprehensive sexual reproductive health education and services to prevent unwanted pregnancies, to make informed and educated choices about their sexual health, and to prevent the spread of HIV.

11. If there is one thing that AIDS has taught us, it is that we cannot treat ourselves out of this pandemic. People and governments everywhere must stop the spread of HIV. Our organizations have learned that prevention methods are effective when there is openness and dialogue. We call for increased investment in prevention strategies, especially those where women control the means to protect themselves.

**WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND THAT GOVERNMENTS:**

- Acknowledge and promote the responsibility and involvement of both men and women in prevention efforts.

12. In conclusion, we affirm our belief that both women and men are created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27). It is not enough to recognize that the face of AIDS is becoming younger, poorer, and more female. We must meet the need where it exists, both at the bedside of the person who is ill, and for the woman at his side. Together as partners we can create a world where all may have life, and have it abundantly.

<sup>1</sup>UNFPA, “Women & HIV/AIDS, Confronting the Crisis,” 2008.

<sup>2</sup> UNFPA, “Women & HIV/AIDS...”

<sup>3</sup> UNAIDS & WHO, “Report on 3 x 5 Initiative,” 2005.