

CommonConcern

A PUBLICATION OF THE WORLD YWCA



FEATURE:

WOMEN, FAITH AND ACTION

YOUNG WOMEN ON THE MOVE:

Living up to the YWCA legacy: Young women share their hope for the movement in the twenty-first century

HIV AND AIDS:

Partnership between faith-based organisations and people living with HIV



World YWCA

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ON THE COVER:

Marisa Ribordy, from Switzerland, is a volunteer at the World YWCA.

Editorial

As a movement, our core identity is framed in four simple letters: YWCA. The Y stands for our commitment to young women's leadership and participation. In addition to young women, the YWCA purpose is to develop the leadership of women—all women. The W reminds us of this commitment to women regardless of their nationality, race, religion or status. The C is also important to our identity and we must continue to articulate and explore what it means to be a movement founded on and inspired by the Christian faith. The A reminds us that the YWCA is a membership movement of many associations across the world with varying context in their communities. It is each of these letters and what they represent that together makes the YWCA movement unique.

The YWCA is not a church, as Rev Pirjo-Liisa Penttinen, General Secretary, YWCA of Finland, reminds us in the Feature in this edition of Common Concern. We do not convert people to Christianity, but we are part of the faith community.

As early founders of the ecumenical movement, the YWCA still plays a role in the faith community. From the early twentieth century, the YWCA provided women of different Christian traditions a safe space to work together in unity to bring social change.

Today, YWCA members come from all faith traditions, religions and belief. In the Leading Change section of this edition, YWCAs in the Middle East share their experience of working as Christian organisations in a region where Christians are the minority. Their stories demonstrate how, through a common vision and with compassion and commitment, women from different faiths can work together. Their stories bring us hope for a future where peace with justice can flourish.

In the Young Women on the Move section, two young women share what being a Christian today means for them and affirm the importance of a Christian heritage in the YWCA movement.

As we prepare to explore the theme 'Women Creating a Safe World' at the World YWCA Council in 2011, we need to understand what

'safe spaces' mean from a Christian perspective. In the Take Action section, Jessica Notwell, World YWCA Vice-President (North America), challenges member associations to consider how safe YWCAs are, especially as we address sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Rev Dr Letty Russell, who was a leading feminist theologian and YWCA member, offers insight into what a ministry of hospitality means. Quoting from the Bible, she reminds us of the words of Paul to the Hebrews: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to the stranger, for by doing so, some have entertained angels without knowing it."

For YWCAs to be a safe space we must welcome strangers for we have been strangers ourselves, welcomed by God. ■



Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda
General Secretary, World YWCA
Photo: Anandi Rebecca Smith

YWCA's Around the World

The World YWCA is founded on and inspired by Christian principles. In this section of Common Concern, we highlight how some YWCAs use creative ways to communicate Christian values to women and young people.

THE BUILDING-BLOCKS OF FAITH: YOUTH IN DENMARK LEARN ABOUT GOD

A group of teenage girls gather around a large pile of LEGO® bricks—an unusual sight for girls their age. They concentrate intensely on finding the right bricks in order to build an elaborate scene that tells a story. When complete, it is not hard to see that the scene depicts a story from the Bible.



YMCA-YWCA of Denmark Youth Programme encourages young people to use Lego to illustrate principles and values from the Bible

The YMCA-YWCA of Denmark's Christian youth club runs a program that uses Lego to help young people illustrate the principles and values from the Bible. "Denmark is well known for the Lego brand of small plastic bricks," explains Kirsten Lund Larsen, General Secretary of the YMCA-YWCA of Denmark, "We have taken advantage of this and introduced Lego as a tool to encourage youth to be imaginative and creative."

To run the programme, local associations order containers of 30 kilograms of Lego bricks. The Lego comes with a guide and project ideas on reconstructing specific stories from the Bible such as Noah's Ark or Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Participants can also depict Biblical concepts such as 'love your neighbour', grace, salvation and faith. As part of the programme, participants publish photos of their Lego scenes on the Internet.

The Christian youth clubs have over 4000 members under 18 years old and using Lego has become a popular part of the programme nationwide.

The YMCA-YWCA of Denmark was formed with the particular aim of building Christian fellowship and sharing the Gospel with young people. "Our vision is to ensure young people in Denmark know about God and understand that God believes in them," says Larsen.

THE BAHAMAS: INTEGRATING CHRISTIANITY INTO YOUTH PROGRAMMES

The YWCA Kids Clubs in the Bahamas uses games, fun activities, Bible stories, singing and liturgical dancing to teach the Bible. "People in the Bahamas are very religious and enjoy going to church and worshipping God," says Rosalie Fawkes General Secretary, YWCA of Bahamas, "Christianity is woven into the fabric of society and parents welcome and support the teaching of Christian principles and values to their children at the YWCA of Bahamas."

For youth, the Y Teens Club brings community role models to share their expertise, knowledge and talents



YWCA of Bahamas Y Teen Club

with the young people and to impart Christian principles to the participants. About 50 young people participate each year. "We simplify the messages in the Bible to make it more easily understood and help the young people apply Christian values to their everyday life situations."

"The 'C' in 'YWCA' stands for 'Christian' and defines the purpose of our association," explains Fawkes, "The Bible provides us with a formula for everyday living and it is important for us to share the Christian Gospel when we organise our youth and children programmes."

FOOD FOR THE BODY, MIND AND SPIRIT

The YWCA of Singapore's monthly Joy Talk classes offer spiritual nourishment for people from all walks of life. The lunchtime fellowship meeting nourishes the minds, bodies and spirits of participants, most of whom are professional and retired women. Each month, a guest speaker is invited to deliver a message on a topic that explores faith and joy.

"The strength of Joy Talk lies in the adoption of a holistic approach in meeting people's needs for their body, mind and spirit," explains Karen Chay, Programmes Executive for the YWCA of Singapore. The fellowship starts with food for the body followed by 'spiritual food' to nourish the spirit and refresh the mind. "Some of our participants have benefited greatly from the physical and spiritual nourishment and have been faithfully attending Joy Talk since 2003," says Chay.

Christians make up just under 15 percent of the population of Singapore and a Christian identity is

important for the YWCA of Singapore. "We must never lose sight of our Christian values and focus," says Chay, "God has blessed our association over the years in immeasurable ways and our programmes and services have grown and multiplied so we can reach out to the needy and disadvantaged people in our community. It is important to always seek God and continue to place our faith and trust in God."



Participants at the YWCA of Singapore Joy Talk classes

Feature

WOMEN, FAITH and ACTION

The World YWCA history is rooted in faith-driven social action. The women who pioneered the YWCA movement were Christians committed to service. Christianity to these women meant faith and action that improved the lives of women and girls as they faced industrialisation, urban migration and war.



A CHRISTIAN LEGACY

Mary Jane Kinnaird, born in 1816, was a philanthropist committed to young women's well-being. Kinnaird was concerned about the safety of young women who moved to London city, often alone, to work or serve in the Crimean war. She raised funds and in 1855 set up housing for young single women in London. Equipped with a library, Bible classes and employment bureau, the housing provided a 'warm Christian atmosphere'. Kinnaird and her associates hoped to help young women cope with the pressures of work and believed it was important to care for the souls of young women along with their physical and mental health.

Emma Roberts, born around 1818, was also committed to young women. She set up a prayer circle in her hometown on the outskirts of London. In 1855, she brought together 23 women to hold intercession prayer for young women—they called themselves the Young Women's Christian Association. The group went beyond prayer and reached out to the young women they prayed for and involved them in activities to build the mind, body and spirit.

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The movement spread in the 1860s and 1870s committed to 'mind, body and spirit'—a slogan that remains strong in the YWCA movement to date.

In 1877, Emma Roberts and Mary Jane Kinnaird met and merged their associations into one national movement for young women. It was the spiritual strength that resided in each of them that made them truly devoted as volunteers and women who gave their talent and resources to ensure all women experience abundant life. The legacy of their Christian identity is present in the YWCA movement today.

FINDING BALANCE

The YWCA's Christian heritage presents some very pertinent questions for the movement today. For some associations, a Christian heritage makes it difficult to address women's human rights issues when Christian history is steeped in patriarchy. For other associations, a Christian heritage raises barriers that make it hard to reach the constituency they serve. To be credible the YWCA needs to respond to the issues of the day and be relevant in a modern society without being untruthful to its history. This challenge is daunting.

Yet some argue that it is precisely because of its Christian heritage that the YWCA is inclusive and offers

hospitality to 'the other'; most YWCAs open their services to women of all faiths and religions and women at the edge of society. Many associations address topics that may be difficult for the Church to discuss. But finding a balanced relevant Christian perspective is not always easy.

Although the challenges women and young women face today are not very different from the challenges the founders of the YWCA worked so hard to address, in many ways, ideology and theology has changed. Over the past 100 years, the World YWCA Council has on several occasions reviewed the World YWCA Constitution to amend language on the Christian principle, most recently in 2007. Amendments have allowed member associations to operate as civil organisations where laws prohibit religious expression in public places. Associations for whom a Christian basis is vital, the revised Constitution still offers a Christian perspective. By asking difficult questions and constantly reviewing its relevance in a changing world, the YWCA movement has managed to stay relevant.

ADVOCACY AND CHRISTIANITY: CAN THE TWO MEET?

The World YWCA strategic framework invites member association to respond to sexual and reproductive health and rights, HIV and AIDS and violence against women—all difficult topics for anyone to discuss, whether from a Christian perspective or not. But women in the YWCA have found creative ways of finding inspiration from Christian values to justify strong action on the issues most relevant to women today.

A woman is raped, her name is Tamara. A widow with no right to inherit property becomes a migrant, her name is Ruth. A young single woman is pregnant in a society where marriage is valued, her name is Mary. The stories of these women are found in the Bible and can inspire the advocacy work of the YWCA. In fact, the YWCA is in a good position to bring global advocacy ideas to the community level and relate them to everyday life. Through Bible Studies that adopt a woman's perspective on biblical stories, women in the YWCA can and do develop Christian driven action to the pressing issues women face today.

Drawing inspiration from the Bible is, however, tricky. Trapping women in morality or rationalising patriarchy through the stories and texts in the Bible is just as easy as finding justification for women's empowerment and gender equality. After all, women's leadership—although

Through Bible Studies that adopt a woman's perspective on biblical stories, women in the YWCA can and do develop Christian driven action to the pressing issues women face today.



not altogether absent—is often downplayed in the Bible. Thankfully, resources for such studies abound, from literature published by the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians to articles published on the Ecumenical Women at the United Nations' blog (see box for list of resources).

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

The YWCA is neither a church nor a religious community, but many associations have close ties with a church community. Where would the Church be without women? Just think how empty, silent and coffee- or tea-free churches would be with out women! But women offer more than serve coffee and assist in Bible Studies and worship.

The Church can learn from the YWCA on how to identify gender-responsive solutions to address the challenges in the community. As it happens, many female church leaders from around the world have roots in the YWCA. As such, women in the YWCA can and should play a key role in church leadership and defining the future of Christian identity.

Working with the Church and religious leaders, the YWCA can empower women and encourage women. At the global level, the World YWCA works closely with ecumenical organisations such as the World Council of Churches and participates on the Global Christian Forum.

Faith without action is futile. YWCA work is inspired by Christian principle and a commitment to women's full and equal participation in society. By responding to the challenges women face and providing workable and effective solutions, women in the YWCA remain true to the founding principles of the movement. ■



Rev Pirjo-Liisa Penttinen

Rev Penttinen is an ordained minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, General Secretary of the YWCA of Finland and represents the World YWCA at the Global Christian Forum.

RESOURCES

Suggested reading to learn more about how women of faith can take action in their community or church:

- **She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse**
by Elizabeth A Johnson
- **The Power We Celebrate: Women's Stories of Faith and Power** *by Musimbi R A Kanyoro (editor), Wendy S Robins (editor)*
- **Still Flowing: Women, God and Church**
by Gillian Paterson
- **Through the eyes of a woman: Bible studies on the experience of women**
by Wendy S Robins (editor)
- **Journey of faith: the history of the World YWCA, 1945-1994**
by Carole Seymour-Jones
- **Ecumenical Women at the United Nations blog:** www.ecumenicalwomen.org

Like a Pearl

Agnieszka Rudkowska, General Secretary of the YWCA of Poland and a theologian, reflects on a woman in the Bible who inspires her when she faces a challenge in her life.

"A capable, intelligent, and virtuous woman—who... can find her? She is far more precious than jewels and her value is far above rubies or pearls." Proverbs 31:10 (Amplified Bible)

This Bible verse, which begins as a beautiful poem giving honour to a mysterious woman, has accompanied me most of my life—even before I truly understood what it meant to be a woman. "Her price is far above pearls" has rung in my ears throughout different stages of my life and if I had to choose a woman in the Bible that inspires me the most, I would turn to the nameless woman in the Book of Proverbs 31:10-31.

The nameless, yet perfect woman is valued. All of her responsibilities as a mother, wife, entrepreneur, advisor and farmer are carried out with excellence and leave her with happiness. She had a voice in the community, unusual at the time, and still had time to stitch handmade clothes for her family. Yet it sounds to me like a recipe for becoming a workaholic and I wonder if there is a deeper message from my nameless friend.

When I read the Proverbs 31 again, I discovered it was not about how much she worked but rather how wise she was. I realised her good deeds were celebrated to illustrate that we are not valued for our contributions but because of who we are in the eyes of God.

Through my role as General Secretary of the YWCA of Poland, my nameless friend has appeared again and again. I realised that my friends, YWCA members and beneficiaries of our programmes are all like pearls. I have travelled throughout Poland and I've met many women. They all work hard, struggle economically, shoulder care giving responsibilities and still find time to be a YWCA member. I have also witnessed strong leaders of communities who set up kindergartens in their villages, when there were none in the village. And

then there are the YWCA Warsaw City members, mostly corporate women, busy from morning to evening and yet they have time to support us. I see a precious pearl in each of their faces.

Whenever I am confronted with a challenge, I recall the faces of the YWCA women in my life and I find strength in my precious 'pearls' to continue and never give up. ■

Agnieszka Rudkowska

General Secretary, YWCA of Poland

Agnieszka H. Rudkowska, a young woman, is General Secretary of the YWCA of Poland. Rudkowska is a Protestant theologian and holds an Applied Social Sciences degree from Warsaw University. She is currently a post graduate student at the Polish Academy of Science, studying Gender Mainstreaming and also takes classes at the Fundraising Institute.



Take Action

A safe space for every woman and girl:

Creating sexual and reproductive health and rights programmes from a faith perspective

Developing programmes that address sexuality with a holistic approach is challenging for many YWCAs. To be effective, programmes on sexual and reproductive health and rights must reach out to women and young women facing discrimination, stigma or exclusion. World YWCA Vice President Jessica Notwell calls on the YWCA movement to ensure YWCAs are safe spaces for all women and to place compassion before judgement when reaching out to women who may normally be excluded.



Jessica Notwell

World YWCA Vice President

**Manager, Women's Economic Council
(formerly Canadian Women's CED Council)**

At the 2003 World YWCA Council in Brisbane, Australia, the YWCA movement adopted a resolution on reproductive health and sexuality committing to "promote and work towards the provision of extensive access to quality education, resources, information, discussion and counselling for women and girls regarding their reproductive health rights and sexuality."¹ As a global Christian, women's and youth movement, the YWCA is taking leadership in speaking about women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. As part of its strategy, the World YWCA has committed to creating safe and inclusive spaces for women,

young women and girls and calls on member associations to nurture an environment where women can share sensitive information on HIV, sexuality, reproductive health and violence.

How are YWCAs creating safe spaces where women and young women can share their personal experience on sexuality through stories, questions, concerns and celebrations?

As a faith-based movement we are challenged to protect the human rights of all women including young women, yet some women, who may be consider difficult or complicated to reach, continue to be excluded and silenced: a young woman seeking a safe space to talk about her feelings

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Participants at the Asia and Pacific RTI learn about the female condom.

toward a child born of rape, a woman who carefully hides the identity of her female partner, a girl who wants to talk about her sexuality. Yet the Christian tradition says, "God chooses to protect the rights and citizenship of those who are excluded."²

In such a powerful movement as the YWCA, we have the opportunity to learn from associations already creating safe spaces for women and young women. An example is the YWCA Trinidad and Tobago's TRIM (The Responsibility is Mine) programme that builds confidence in young women to make responsible sexual and reproductive health choices. YWCA Canada's Girlspace provides girls with a safe online space to discuss healthy relationships and sexual health. The YWCA of Ethiopia offers safe spaces where young women can learn about reproductive health including HIV and safely access health products like condoms and sanitary pads.

But we still have a long way to go as a movement before we can

In such a powerful movement as the YWCA, we have the opportunity to learn from associations already creating safe spaces for women and young women.

truly say all YWCAs are safe spaces for all women. Sexuality can be a contentious issue in the YWCA movement and there are spaces within the YWCA where young women who are HIV positive and want to become pregnant, girls who want to understand their sexuality, lesbians, or women who have chosen early termination of pregnancy feel unable to talk openly about their experiences or ideas.

The YWCA's commitment to safe spaces challenges all of us to ask these important questions: What am I doing to ensure my YWCA is a safe space for all women? Are there women and young women who do not feel welcome or comfortable at my YWCA? What can I do to change this?

The way forward is clear. Imagine a future where every YWCA is a safe space for every woman. Imagine

yourself leading change inside the YWCA. Start a conversation, start a programme, start a campaign, start today. ■

1 World YWCA Global Strategy on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and HIV and AIDS 2008-2012

2 Ecumenical Women. (2009). Faith at the UN Gender in the Church: Ecumenical Women's Guide to Advocacy, p. 69.

Welcoming the stranger

In the Bible, God calls on Christians to welcome the stranger. In this extract from 'Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference', author Letty Russell explores what hospitality means and invites readers to look beyond offering a warm smile and a good meal to standing in solidarity with people who are considered 'strangers' because of their class, religious background, gender, race or ethnic group.

JUST HOSPITALITY: GOD'S WELCOME IN A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

There are a lot of 'missing persons' in our world today whose situation of poverty, injustice and suffering makes God weep. These missing persons are not strangers to God, for God already has reached out to care for them. Yet they are strangers in the world who need to know God cares through the witness of a church that practises a ministry of hospitality and justice on their behalf.

HOSPITALITY

What do we mean by hospitality? In the church we often think of hospitality as what the women offer after worship service on Sunday. We do not think of this as a form of ministry but rather assume it means 'tea and crumpets'. In other contexts, the idea of hospitality is reduced to sexual services offered by 'ladies of the night'.

Although hospitality is a form of Christian spirituality and is basic to the biblical message, the practise of the biblical injection of hospitality has fallen into disuse in our churches and society. Hospitality is the practise of God's welcome by reaching across difference to participate in God's actions bringing justice and healing

to our world in crisis. Such action is not easy. Yet the biblical witness is clear: The unexpected presence of God and Christ in and through actions of hospitality is seen in Abraham and Sarah's hospitality to divine messengers at the oaks of Mamre and the discovery in the risen Christ in the breaking of bread in Emmaus (Gen. 18:1-15; Luke 24:13-35). Hebrews 13: 2 remind us, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." The many injunctions to practise hospitality to the widow, the orphan, and the stranger, in thanksgiving for Israel's deliverance from bondage and for God's gifts, remind us that we have been strangers who are welcomed by God and are to welcome others in return (Exod 23:9). This practise of hospitality is the ministry of all the members of a congregation and not just church women's groups, welcoming committees, or clergy.

In Matthew 25: 31-46 Jesus promises to be with those who offer hospitality to the least of our brothers and sisters. From this it would seem that hospitality can be understood as *solidarity with strangers*, a mutual relationship of care and trust in which we share the struggle for empowerment, dignity, and fullness of life. The word for hospitality in the Greek New Testament is *philoxenia*, love of the stranger. Its

opposite is *xenophobia*, hatred of the stranger. The ministry of the church is to be partners with strangers, to welcome those whom Christ welcomed, and thus learn to be a community in which people are made one in Jesus Christ in spite of their different classes, religious backgrounds, genders, races and ethnic groups. Our *koinonia* or partnership in Christ is a gift of our baptism and not a result of being one class, race, or sexual orientation. It is a gift that transcends real differences through participation in the mission and ministry of the church on behalf of healing the brokenness of the world, beginning with ourselves. ■

Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference, by Letty Russell. Edited by J. Shannon Clarkson and Kate M. Ott. Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. Reprinted with permission.



Rev. Dr. Letty M. Russell (1929-2007) was one of the world's foremost feminist theologians and long-time member of the Yale Divinity School faculty. Rev. Dr. Russell, one of the first women to be ordained in the United Presbyterian Church, is the author of 'The Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church' among many other titles. From 1995 to 1999 she led the World YWCA study on the credal basis and presented the report to the 1999 World YWCA Council in Cairo, Egypt. She continued to be actively involved with the World YWCA, volunteering at the 2003 World YWCA Council in Brisbane, Australia.

Young Women on the Move

Living up to the YWCA legacy: Young women share their hope for the movement in the twenty-first century

Despite the talk on the streets, there are many young women proud to be Christian. We asked two inspirational young YWCA leaders how faith guides them in their everyday life and whether they think Christianity is holding back the YWCA movement.



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I believe that we, the younger generation, should live up to the YWCA legacy and continue to bravely face the world with our big 'C for Christian' in the middle of our name.

VALERIA MEJIA: WORLD YWCA BOARD MEMBER AND YWCA OF HONDURAS MEMBER

I am from Tegucigalpa, the capital state of Honduras. The CIA world fact-book lists Honduras as the second poorest country in Central America with an extraordinarily unequal distribution of income and high unemployment (50.7 percent of the population live under the poverty line).

Growing up in this environment marked me in a significant way, my faith did not allow me to overlook and disregard the suffering of many people in Honduras. My faith in God and Jesus Christ, my belief in the Bible, where the essence of God's teachings are the basic yet complex concept of loving one another inspire me.

In Honduras, we have learned to be thankful for every meal, opportunity and little luxury; my gratitude is to the Lord. God's abundant grace is one of the main reasons I

joined the YWCA, combined with the desire to help those in difficulty. Maybe this sounds naïve and it certainly has not happened the way I envisaged but it's not easy trying to save the world.

There has been a lot of debate in our national movement regarding the importance and credibility of the Christian heritage of the YWCA. We have heard how donors back away from us for that reason, yet we know many others help us precisely because we are a Christian organisation. I believe the women who founded the YWCA movement left us with a legacy of empowerment and dignity. They fought fiercely for what they believed in and they created a name for our movement that has been respected and valued. I believe that we, the younger generation, should live up to that legacy and continue to bravely face the world with our big 'C for Christian' in the middle of our name. Some people will embrace us and others will reject us, but in the end what is important is that we continue working towards a world with justice, peace, love for our neighbours, forgiveness, kindness, freedom, inclusiveness and respect...after all these are the Christian values we embrace.

GERTRUDE EUGENIA DAVIDSON: MEMBER OF THE YWCA OF GHANA AND AYNET (AFRICAN YWCAS NETWORK) BOARD

As a young woman, my faith has been tried and tested and has stood the test of time. About four years ago, my mother became very ill and we tried everything medically possible to no avail. At that moment in my life, I remembered the verse in the Holy Bible that says whatever you ask in faith be sure to receive it. I based a prayer on this and she was healed.

There have been times where circumstances in my life prompted me to ask myself if the faith I profess is worth it. There have also been times I considered quitting but this faith would never allow me. It does the unimaginable. I don't know about the kind of faith others profess but my faith orders my steps so it always makes me aware that my conscience has a conscience. It is the faith built on an unshakable rock that is Jesus Christ.

I think that being a Christian organisation has made the YWCA a force to reckon with in this era. Christianity has never held anyone back and from the inception of the YWCA one can proclaim the founding mothers couldn't have settled for a better religion. This is evident in that so many years down the line the Christ factor is what has kept the YWCA running. The truth is that because of the common faith we profess as Christians we have been able to stay together through tough times.

As a young woman, I can say that if it were not for the YWCA, many young women would not have really understood what practicing Christianity means. The YWCA has opened my eyes to the testimony of other women

whose faith in Christ has brought them far in life. As a young woman, I couldn't have asked for a better faith or a better organisation. ■

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Leading Change

YWCA's in the Middle East: Testimonies of tolerance and cooperation

The Middle East is home to the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Although the region has seen many civil conflict and wars, examples of acceptance, hospitality and cooperation abound. The YWCA presence in the Middle East dates back to 1893 when YWCA work began in Palestine. Since then, the YWCAs in the region have exemplified tolerance and cooperation delivering services and programmes in their predominately Muslim communities.





YWCA OF LEBANON: Compassion bears fruit

Mona Khauli, President

Lebanon is a pluralistic society of 3.5 million people living in the relatively small area of approximately 10, 000 square kilometres (3,860 square miles). An additional 500,000 Palestinian refugees and some 600,000 foreign workers live in Lebanon. Historically, Lebanon has been a haven for communities escaping religious or political persecution and there are 18 religious communities freely worshipping and practising their belief.

The immediate neighbourhood of the YWCA headquarters is predominantly Muslim, where close to 20 different groups fought for control of the area during 17 years of civil war. It is in this context that the YWCA of Lebanon operates, regardless of religious or social class issues, addressing humanitarian needs that focus primarily on women and children. This is done with transparency and in partnership with local groups and earns YWCA the respect and absolute trust of the community.

During the war, between 1975 and 1991, South Lebanon was subject to heavy bombing and shelling by Israeli forces. One day, while school children celebrated a Muslim festival carrying candles and chanting, one of the candles sparked a big fire causing great panic and many casualties. YWCA members quickly went to the street to rescue the injured children and deliver them to hospitals.

Many years later, one of the YWCA members who had been among the rescuers jumped into a taxi in the city. As she neared her destination and prepared to settle the fare, the driver turned and said, "Madam, you don't owe me anything, I owe my life to you. You do not remember me, I am the little boy you carried in your arms to a hospital for treatment of severe fire wounds, but I remember you and I will never forget your kindness."



YWCA OF JORDAN: Working together for a safer community

Leila Diab, General Secretary

The YWCA of Jordan has been serving a community of women, men and children of different faiths, mainly Christians and Muslims since the 1950s. Jordan's population is predominantly Muslim (95 percent) and the rest are Christians from different denominations. Following the footsteps of Jesus Christ, the YWCA of Jordan continues to serve through the years without any social, racial or religious discrimination, taking care of the needy, poor and deprived.

The YWCA of Jordan has a number of projects and programmes that include services for the Muslim community. Our work in the refugee camps includes a kindergarten, bakery, family counselling centre and sewing centre. It is always a pleasure to see the radiant faces of the children as they come to the kindergarten every morning and the hope on the women's faces employed in the bakery and the sewing centre. The Secretarial School, in the capital Amman, and the hostels in Husn and Amman enrol mostly Muslim women who register early to acquire knowledge and education in our Christian institution. The secretarial school also offers classes to Iraqi women and men and women from the Palestinian refugee camps, namely Beqa'a and Madaba.

In November 2005, suicide bombers attacked three hotels in Jordan. The Young Moslem Women's Associations and the YWCA of Jordan worked in partnership to allocate funds to support bereaved families—showcasing the close cooperation of one nation.

The YWCA of Jordan continues to be a shining example in the community as its members of dedicated Christian women, who believe in endlessly serving a community that is a mixture of Muslims and Christians, allow no room for differences or prejudice.



YWCA OF EGYPT: Youth find common ground

Dr Marlene Anawati, President

The YWCA of Egypt is the first and one of the oldest Christian women's associations in Egypt. One of its most important services is the Youths' and Children's Summer Camps. These Camps are quite famous and the children who participate become eager to return every summer. We accept children and youth whether they are Christian or Muslim. We offer them leadership training and try to develop their mind, body and soul.

The YWCA partners with the Minister of Youth, who has come to appreciate our work. He has invited our youth to his camps and was impressed by how well they behave, participate and integrate with their peers. As a result, the YWCA youth have been invited to represent Egypt abroad in several Government-organised youth activities.

Another important youth activity is the Christmas Bazaar, which our YWCA Camp leaders plan and implement. Youth from both religions participate and invitations and advertisements are sent all over Cairo. A great number of Muslim men, women and children participate. During the Bazaar, Christmas Carols are sang all day and music to which everyone can dance is played. On such days, it is possible to see how easily people of both religions integrate. Local YWCAs in Assiut and Minia run similar events where the Egyptian community as a whole participates.

All our hostels have young women students of both religions living together as very good friends. The hostels have been operating for 80 years without any discrimination problems. The YWCA of Egypt is one of the most respected organisations amongst Christians and Muslims in the country because of its lack of discrimination against race, religion, class as well as for its good relationships and respect of government laws and rules.



YWCA OF PALESTINE: Building bridges of understanding

Mira Rizek, General Secretary

For many women and girls, the YWCA of Palestine has been a haven. It has provided the best and most affordable access to technical and vocational education, health awareness, safe childcare services and an empowering space to grow self-confidence, share miseries and rejoice in achievements. For people living under Israeli Occupation and in the most marginalised and remote rural areas or refugee camps, the YWCA of Palestine ensures their voices are heard.

The association dates back to 1893 and although it started as a relief agency, over the years the YWCA developed its programmes and strategies in full partnership with the communities it serves. What has kept us going for so many years? Our ability to respond to the most needy, our desire to reach out to women, children and youth and listen and work with them in full partnership and our ability to be genuinely responsive and build bridges of understanding.

Christians in Palestine have always been a minority, constituting 12-15 percent of the population in the early 1900s and decreasing to less than 1.5 percent to date. The YWCA runs programmes in two refugee camps, namely Aqbat Jaber and Jalazoune Refugee camp where the residents are exclusively Muslims. The residents recognise and respect the Christian identity of the organisation and continue to support and even protect its presence and services.

The YWCA has always promoted its Christian values of equity, fairness and empowering the most vulnerable through its work. We are genuine advocates for the powerless.

HIV and AIDS

Partnership between faith-based organisations and people living with HIV

As a person who has been living with HIV for 15 years, I know how important partnerships between faith-based organisation and people living with HIV are, says Sophie Dilmitis, HIV and AIDS Coordinator at the World YWCA. In this piece, she shares some ideas on how religious leaders can meaningfully involve people living with HIV in their work.

Many religious leaders and churches believe they have a moral duty to offer care for people living with HIV and to get involved in prevention. Whilst this moral obligation is welcomed and important, it can make relationships unequal as it creates a dichotomy of 'supporter' versus 'supported'. At this stage of the epidemic, we need to move from moral obligation to meaningful partnerships in the response to HIV and AIDS. A person who uses drugs should be spoken to as Jesus spoke with Zacchaeus, the tax collector or the Samaritan woman at the well or the lepers and all those who were rejected by society. Jesus spoke with them as equals, without looking down on them.

Faith-based organisations play an important role in providing health worldwide and this is critical for so many who urgently need support. However, we still need more religious leaders and faith-based organisations that can boldly speak out against human rights violations. The Human Rights Declaration was founded on values that all people of faith uphold

and yet many people struggle to balance rights versus values.

The human right to information and education is often ignored in the context of sexuality education and HIV programming. Often, it is the people who have personally experienced these challenges who stand, alone, and advocate for change. Building equal partnerships can help bridge issues around morality, as HIV is so much more than just a health issue. Equal partnership cannot be forged from a perception of assumed promiscuity, homosexuality, drug use and sex work. To develop meaningful relationships with people living with HIV, religious leaders and faith-based organisation can take the following recommendations:

1 Work with people who have real-life experience with HIV.

To address HIV we must remember the responsibilities we all have to provide correct and consistent information. If you are not comfortable doing this, invite someone who is comfortable addressing issues around sex and

sexuality as these issues are closely linked to HIV and are central to human nature.

2 Create HIV-prevention messages that also reach people living with HIV.

People living with HIV should not be excluded from HIV messaging but included as partners for creating change and valued members of the community.

3 Improve knowledge on HIV and stay informed.

Religious leaders need to become well versed in the language and have well developed knowledge around HIV. Faith-based organisations need to speak out on these issues, with people living with HIV, and provide accurate and comprehensive prevention information. ■

Sophie Dilmitis

World YWCA HIV and AIDS Coordinator



Briefing

From the World YWCA



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YWCA REGIONAL TRAINING INSTITUTE GENERATES COMMITMENTS FOR ACTION ACROSS THE MOVEMENT

The final Regional Training Institute (RTI) for 2009 concluded in Bali, Indonesia with the Asia and Pacific YWCAs committing to strengthen ongoing programmes and initiatives that address violence against women (VAW), sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and HIV.

From August 2-7, 2009, over 90 women and young women leaders representing 17 YWCAs across Asia and Pacific explored the issues of VAW, SRHR, HIV and AIDS, migration and climate change. "We identified collective opportunities and challenges and committed to deepen our work through personal action, through our local and national YWCAs, through regional and global collaborations and through partnership with others," said Juli Dugdale, World YWCA Programme Director for Asia and the Pacific.

Earlier in the year, RTIs were held for the Caribbean YWCAs in Trinidad and Tobago and YWCA of Nigeria hosted the African YWCAs for their weeklong training.

RTIs in the Middle East, Europe and Latin America will be held in 2010.

Visit www.worldywca.org for photos and stories from the RTIs.



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1. Asia and Pacific RTI: Susan Brennan (World YWCA President), Dr. Nafis Sadik (Special Adviser to the UN Secretary General) and Juli Dugdale (World YWCA Programme Director for Asia and Pacific).

2. Caribbean RTI: Hon. Marlene McDonald (Minister for Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, Trinidad and Tobago) and Icilda Humes (World YWCA Board member)

3. Africa RTI: Hélène Yinda (World YWCA Programme Director for Africa and the Middle East) and Yetunde Teriba (Director of the African Union Women, Gender and Development Directorate)



3



World YWCA Board members, Geneva, Switzerland October 2009.

ANNUAL WORLD YWCA BOARD MEETING AFFIRMS WOMEN'S ROLE IN BUILDING PEACE AND SECURITY

The World YWCA Board concluded its annual meeting in Geneva on October 9, 2009 with a commitment to support the YWCA movement in building women's leadership to create safe and secure communities where women and girls can live lives free of violence. Mid-way through its term, the Board focused on emerging issues the movement faces in preparation for the World YWCA Council to be held in Switzerland in July 2011. The theme for the World Council is 'Women Creating a Safe World'. Noting an increased global focus on women, peace and security the Board affirmed that safety and security is an important issue for women and girls today.

As a commitment to strengthen women's leadership in promoting human rights for women and girls, the Board developed the implementation of a special human rights award to be conferred at the 2011 World Council in the name of Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The Board concluded by affirming the spirit of shared leadership evident in the work of the YWCA movement and affirmed the work of partners, donors, volunteer and staff who contribute their time, talents and treasures to the YWCA movement.

WORLD YWCA WELCOMES UNITED NATIONS RESOLUTION ON NEW AGENCY FOR WOMEN

On September 14, 2009, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a crucial resolution on gender equality and women's rights. The resolution gives the go-ahead for the creation of a composite United Nations agency that will promote women's rights all over the world.

"This is a landmark decision and has taken years of collective action by the women's movement," reflected World YWCA General Secretary Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda. "The 2007 World YWCA Council recommendation put forward by YWCA Canada, called on the YWCA movement to support the global Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR) Campaign that advocates for an international multilateral women's agency at the United Nations and we will continue to support the campaign as part of our advocacy work."

World YWCA Vice President Jessica Notwell believes the YWCA movement must sustain momentum around the GEAR campaign. "The YWCA has been an important voice in moving this resolution forward and we can continue to play an important role in monitoring progress on this resolution and holding UN member states accountable to women and girls," says Notwell.

Moo Moo Hsue, World YWCA Intern (2009), reads a prayer during the Week of Prayer worship service at the Ecumenical Center Chapel, Geneva, Switzerland.
Photo: World Alliance of YMCAs



WITNESS VISIT CALLS FOR PEACE WITH JUSTICE

A delegation of 45 women, men and young people, representing 13 YWCAs and YMCAs from four continents, visited the YWCA and YMCA in the occupied Palestinian territories from September 25 – October 1, 2009. Hosted by the YWCA of Palestine and the YMCA of East Jerusalem, the participants witnessed the realities facing people living in the area.

The programme included briefings with international organisations responding to the humanitarian situations in the occupied Palestinian territories where participants listened to statistics depicting the harsh conditions many Palestinians live in. With nearly 600 checkpoints in the West Bank alone, movement is restricted making daily life difficult for many people. A visit to families living in refugee camps left participants moved and committed to raising awareness on the conditions the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has created.

The participants found hope in the programmes the YWCA and YMCA are offering including vocational centres, kindergartens and centres for women and young people.

WEEK OF PRAYER: STRIVING FOR GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP FOR ALL

Member associations of the World YWCA and World Alliance of YMCAs observed the annual joint Week of Prayer and World Fellowship from November 8 - 14. For over a century the two movements have issued a joint call to prayer in the second week of November as an important reminder of the spiritual vision that drives their efforts to create a better world for all people. This year, the Week of Prayer theme was 'Striving for global citizenship for all' and the reflections developed for the week focused on the need for global solidarity.

Visit our website today for more articles on the work of the World YWCA and stories from YWCAs around the world.

www.worldywca.org

People

FAREWELL

The World YWCA bids farewell to **Juliarty Soejarman-Masson** who joined the World YWCA in 1988 as Administrative Assistant for the Programme Development Department. Juliarty then moved to the General Secretariat as Assistant to the Deputy General Secretary. Juliarty will return to her native country, Indonesia, with her family.

World YWCA interns, **Moo Moo Hsoe** of Myanmar and **Andrea Núñez Argote** of Mexico are set to return home after a year at the World YWCA. Both young women are eager to share their new knowledge and skills with their local associations and continue leading change in their communities. During the year, Moo Moo worked with the Communications Department while Andrea contributed to the World YWCA advocacy efforts.

The World YWCA extends its appreciation to Juliarty for her rich contribution to the movement and best wishes to Moo Moo and Andrea for a bright and successful future.



Juliarty Soejarman-Masson, Moo Moo Hsoe and Andrea Núñez Argote

NATIONAL APPOINTMENTS

New General Secretaries:

Lalolama Lilio-Areta – YWCA of American Samoa
Sake Kedrayate – YWCA of Fiji
Alice Iwebu – YWCA of Solomon Islands
Christine de Alwis – YWCA of Sri Lanka

New Presidents:

Suavai Tagaloca – YWCA of American Samoa
Ana María Doll – YWCA of Argentina
Dr. Carla Barnett – YWCA of Belize
Lynne Kent – YWCA Canada
Amal Chbeir – YWCA of Lebanon
Bal Kumari Gurung/Ra – YWCA of Nepal
Debra Stock – YWCA USA

Supporters

Anita Andersson (Sweden) in honour of Maj-Brit Gustafsson 90 years

Silvanna Ayaipoma de Mattos (Peru)

Jane Bennett (Switzerland)

Susan Brennan (Australia)

Martin Buccieri (USA)

Young Mi Cho (Korea)

Fabia Christen Koch (Switzerland)

Estate of Marion Foster (Canada)

Natalie Fisher Spalton (Switzerland)

Carolyn Flowers (USA)

Catherine Anny Graf-Stern (Switzerland)

Mary Guthrie (Australia)

Lisette Donizetti Herrera Trinidad (Peru)

Kuniyo Kawabata (Japan)

Hyun Ja Kim Oh (Korea)

Kaburo Kobia (Switzerland)

Ping Lee (Taiwan)

Joan Meredith (Australia)

Andrea Núñez Argote (Switzerland)

June Quan (USA)

Katsuko Saito (Japan)

Mery Schiaffino de Piña (Peru)

Constance Shumba (Uganda) in honour of Noerine Kaleeba's leadership

Janet Sitzman (USA)

Lynn Sorrentino (Switzerland)

Kyoko Tawara (Japan)

Eriko Tsubono (Japan)

Kayo Tsuji (Japan)

Rebecca Vassarotti (Australia)

Kathrin Vogler (Switzerland)

YWCA Canada - St Thomas-Elgin (Canada)

YWCA of Australia (Australia)

YWCA of Taiwan (Taiwan)

Geeske Zanen (Netherlands)

CALENDAR OF EVENTS 2010

JANUARY

JANUARY 25 – JANUARY 29

World Social Forum – Porto Alegre/RS, Brazil

JANUARY 18 – FEBRUARY 5

CEDAW 45th session - Geneva, Switzerland

FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY 8 – FEBRUARY 12

4th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights - Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

MARCH

MARCH 1 – MARCH 12

UN Commission on the Status of Women 54th Session, New York, USA

MARCH 1 – MARCH 5

6th Central American Congress on HIV and AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (CONCASIDA) – Costa Rica

MARCH 5

World Day of Prayer (Cameroon)

MARCH 8

International Women's Day

MARCH 21

International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination



APRIL

APRIL 11 – APRIL 18

European Study Session Young Women
Creating a Safe World – Budapest, Hungary

APRIL 24

World YWCA Day

MAY

World YWCA Regional Training Institute for
Middle East - Egypt

MAY 29 – JUNE 4

World Week of Prayer for Peace in Palestine
and Israel

JUNE

JUNE 26

International Day Against Drug Abuse and
Illicit Trafficking



JULY

JULY 18 – JULY 23

XVIII International AIDS Conference
(AIDS 2010), Vienna, Austria

JULY 12 – JULY 30

CEDAW 46th session - New York, USA

JULY 19 - JULY 24

World Alliance of YMCAs World Council -
Hong Kong

AUGUST

AUGUST 12

International Youth Day

SEPTEMBER

SEPTEMBER 21

International Day of Prayer for Peace

SEPTEMBER 27 - OCTOBER 1

World YWCA Board Meeting

OCTOBER

**ALL MONTH - BREAST CANCER
AWARENESS MONTH (BCAM)**

OCTOBER 4 – OCTOBER 22

CEDAW 47th session, Geneva, Switzerland

OCTOBER 11 – OCTOBER 17

YWCA Week Without Violence

OCTOBER 15

World Rural Women's Day

OCTOBER 17

International Day for the Eradication of
Poverty

OCTOBER 19 - OCTOBER 24

European Representatives Meeting /
World YWCA Regional Training Institute
for Europe, Estonia

NOVEMBER

World YWCA Regional Training Institute
for Latin America - Mexico

NOVEMBER 8 – NOVEMBER 14

YWCA - YMCA Week of Prayer

NOVEMBER 20

Universal Children's Day

NOVEMBER 25

International Day for the Elimination of
Violence against Women

NOVEMBER 25 – DECEMBER 10

16 Days of Activism to Stop Violence
against Women

NOVEMBER 29

International Day of Solidarity with the
Palestinian People

DECEMBER

DECEMBER 1

World AIDS Day

DECEMBER 5

International Volunteer Day for Economic
and Social Development

DECEMBER 10

Human Rights Day

DECEMBER 18

International Migrants Day