

Women join women around the world to pray for justice

Written by Jean Gray

“Selamat datang” greets those who attend this year’s World Day of Prayer service on Friday, March 2. The Malaysian words, which mean “peace and welcome,” serve as a basis for harmony among men, women and children of all nations.

The women of Malaysia, depicted in colorful costumes by women from area churches, expound on this year’s theme, “Let Justice Prevail.” The World Day of Prayer committee of Malaysia prepared this year’s program.

The 2 p.m. service opens with a photo slideshow accompanied by a medley of music followed by the procession song, “Let Justice Prevail.” Holyoke resident Dorothy Ortner leads the hour-long service, which she hopes inspires women to bring justice to the world by using the unique gifts of femininity to recognize their own needs, wants and desires and to use those same needs, wants and desires where justice is lacking for others.

Ortner said she sees herself as an advocate by suggesting that justice work is “done best and most effectively through personal change.” She related that she based the message of hope she plans to share on three personal experiences she had while learning and working in the developing countries of Tanzania and Nicaragua.

World Day of Prayer, “a global ecumenical movement of informed prayer and prayerful action,” dates back to the 19th century when women from the United States and Canada initiated mission work that related concerns for women and children. The role of prayer in that work began in 1812 and led to annual days and weeks of prayer. In 1887, women of the Presbyterian faith, joined by Home Missions and Methodist Women, called for a Day of Prayer and self-denial for foreign missions. The Baptists began a Day of Prayer for foreign missions in 1891. In 1885, the Women’s Auxiliary of the Anglican Church of Canada initiated “a day of cooperate intercessions for mission.”

Women continued to offer prayer and mission work for world peace over the years, especially following World War I, and in 1927 called for a “World Day of Prayer for Missions.” Organizers shortened the name to World Day of Prayer in 1928. Those interested can find more information on the movement on the Internet at www.worlddayofprayer.net.

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While the event reaches worldwide, Ortner said small communities like Haxtun, Holyoke and Fleming can work for justice through relationships beyond the community that affect attitudes and actions on a broader scale. “An example is that women have buying power,” said Ortner, adding that supporting businesses that pay fair wages and treat employees and customers with respect encourages justice. “The saying ‘to think globally and act locally’ if lived and done with strong intention, has power to ‘Let Justice Prevail.’”

Ortner said her own work for justice made her a better person. She served as the first field organizer for Bread of the World, 1974-76. Her field included the entire United States where she worked with persons from multiple faith denominations.

From 1983 to 1990, Ortner served as staff member for 33 Protestant Church Mission Boards as director of adult basic education primarily in developing countries throughout the Southern Hemisphere, taking her to New York in the United States as well as Asia, Africa and Latin and Central America.

She returned to her hometown of Holyoke in 1991, where she helped initiate the English as a Second Language program, now known as Family Education. She also served as chair of the housing committee as part of the Phillips County Economic Development Corporation in 2000 and remains active in the Phillips County Arts Council. “I think arts are essential to the quality and life of justice in a community,” said Ortner.

The women involved in this year’s event represent churches from Holyoke, Haxtun and Fleming. They encourage people from the area, regardless of religious affiliation, to join them on Friday, March 2, at 2 p.m., at the Haxtun Church of Brethren, 137 North Logan, Haxtun, for this year’s World Day of Prayer service.

“We love and serve the same Devine Person,” said Ortner. “If we can pray together, there is a greater possibility that we will be more committed to work together so that justice will prevail.”

The women invite those attending to join them for refreshments following the service.

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