On Tuesday 8th March the global community will celebrate the economic, political and social achievements of women past, present and future. The unfolding of history continues to reveal women’s expanding contribution; in the midst of historic shifts we have seen both the struggle and capacity of women in moving towards fulfilling their potential as part of the human family.

When we reach into the past century of our family stories and meet our mothers, grandmothers, great grandmothers and others in our extended families, we catch a glimpse of emerging possibilities for women alongside significant changes within the world at large. To be acknowledged as fully human and treated with a regard that honours that truth continues to be a litmus test of the maturation of any community. Women of spirit have left a legacy that invites us to honour the past, be inspired today and courageously envision and work towards a hope-filled future for all people.

This weekend in our parishes we have a particular opportunity to express our gratitude for the contribution women have made to the world and to the church. It is an opportunity to reflect on the women who have shaped us. Not only our mothers, in whose wombs ‘we were knitted together,’ but the many others who held dreams of a better future and weathered the storms of life in ways that encourage us to draw deeply from the wells of our faith and act courageously. St Mary of the Cross MacKillop is one such person. Her life is a reminder that here in the land of the Holy Spirit, we can be agents of change in our willingness to notice a need, overcome fear in facing paths yet to be trod and respond in ways that give witness to a profound faith that can move mountains.

This parish kit has been prepared to support parishes in celebrating the centenary of International Women’s Day 1911–2011. This is an opportunity to express gratitude to the God of gifts for women past, present and yet to come. It is a time also to affirm and thank women for the blessing they are in the generous sharing of their gifts within family life, society and the church.

In opening our hearts to this occasion, you are invited to use the reflections and prayers within this kit in your liturgies and celebrations.

With every good wish,

Tricia Walsh
Councillor, Council for Australian Catholic Women
Note from Bishop Michael Malone

Dear Friends

The Bishops Commission for Church Ministry is delighted once again to prepare a resource to honour and celebrate the women in our Church who contribute in enormous ways. I commend this resource to you and encourage you to find affirming and life-giving ways to celebrate the women in your own parish.

With every good wish,

+Michael Malone
Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle
Chairman, Bishops Commission for Church Ministry

Liturgynotes

Preparation

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY (8 MARCH) IS A GLOBAL day celebrating the economic, political and social achievements of women past, present and future. This Parish Kit is prepared to enable parishes to celebrate and acknowledge the women who contribute in various ways to the life and mission of the Church. It is an opportunity to encourage parish leaders to set aside time to affirm the expertise of women in the local community.

2011 marks the centenary of International Women’s Day being celebrated around the world. Recognising and honouring these 100 years is an opportunity to inspire and affirm the work of women in society and in the Church.

Focusing on women’s involvement and participation in different areas of Church life and ministry through theological reflection, pastoral planning and dialogue with women and women’s groups on particular issues is a priority. Engaging the wisdom, expertise and talents of women is integral for the enhancement of the Church and the wider society.

Did you know that:

• In nearly every country, women work longer hours than men, but are usually paid less and are more likely to live in poverty.
• Women produce half the world’s food and work 2/3 of the world’s working hours, yet earn 10% of the world’s income and own 1% of the world’s property.
• In today’s world 1 in 6 adults are still not literate, 2/3 are women.

Welcome

TODAY IN OUR COMMUNITY WE recognize and honour International Women’s Day. This day provides an opportunity to reflect on and celebrate the contribution that all women make in families, society and the Church. Actively encouraging women’s participation in the Church should be a priority. We need to be an inclusive Church which embraces the talents, gifts and expertise of all.

As we acknowledge International Women’s Day this year, may we pause to recognize, celebrate and give thanks for women’s God-given, baptismal commitment. Today we are invited to pray for all women who contribute to the Church through a diversity of roles and tasks.

Some interesting facts about the wellbeing of women and the wellbeing of our communities...

Did you know that:

• One of the most powerful ways of improving the status and wellbeing of women is to ensure effective participation in decision making.
  “The continuing marginalization of women in decision-making has been both a cause and an effect of slow progress in many areas of development.”

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan

United Nations Visitor Centre
Homily suggestions for the Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflections for International Women’s Day

Deuteronomy 11: 18, 26-28, 32
Romans 3: 21-25a, 28
Matthew 7:21-27

THE OVERWHELMING MESSAGE IN BOTH THE FIRST reading today and the Gospel seems to be the importance of not simply hearing the word of God but acting upon it. The Book of Deuteronomy is, at its core, a law book for the Hebrew people and in this reading we are presented with today, Moses emphasises the importance of obeying the commandments. He tells the people, “Take these words into your heart and soul”. Words that are taken in to our heart and soul are usually not treated lightly. They become our inspiration and can motivate all that we do.

In the gospel reading, Jesus it seems is following a similar theme. It is not enough to hear the words of God, but the requirement is to act upon the words. “Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts upon them will be like a wise person who builds their house on a strong foundation.”

It is true for many people in developed western society that we hear many, many words each day. We hear and read words in the media, in our workplaces, as we travel from place to place, in the marketplace, in places of entertainment and in places of worship. We could say that we are bombarded with words, with ideas, and with suggestions about what to do, what to think or what to buy. The choices and options open to us are manifold. The more wealth we have, the greater the choice. And yet, here is this timeless message in Matthew’s gospel: The one who listens to the word of God and acts upon it is the wise person.

The Deuteronomic author’s presentation of a choice between the promise of life or the threat of a curse invites the reader to choose the way of life, that is to ‘take the word of God into our hearts’, so that it becomes the foundation for all that we do.

The writer of Matthew’s gospel presents, through the words of Jesus, a similar theme. Clearly the message for us today is the imperative of not merely hearing the word of God, not merely prophesying in the name of God, not merely calling ourselves Christians but to act upon the word of God. What does that look like today in our world? We can all think of people in our local community who are prepared to act to bring about justice for others: people who work to bring about the reign of God in the lives of the poor, the disadvantaged and the oppressed; people who work to set others free. Many of those people are unsung heroes. Often it is because they are doing the hard work out of the public eye that their work goes unnoticed.

As we celebrate International Women’s Day in this coming week, it might be an occasion to honour the work of women in our community who have been more than hearers of the word but have acted upon the call to justice in our world.
Each year around the world, International Women’s Day (IWD) is celebrated on March 8. Hundreds of events occur not just on this day but throughout March to mark the economic, political and social achievements of women. However, this year marks the centenary of IWD which was first declared in 1910. 2011 sees 100 years of International Women’s Day having been celebrated around the world.

I am sure many will agree that women have made great strides in equality yet there is still a great deal to be achieved on many fronts and the 2011 IWD Centenary provides a unique and global opportunity to reignite, inspire and channel efforts towards women’s equality for the future.

Last year, Australia celebrated the formal recognition of one Australian woman, St Mary of the Cross, MacKillop, one who can certainly be described as a woman who heard the word of God and acted upon it. A frequent saying of Mary’s was, “Never see a need without trying to do something about it,” and as we now know she embodied this in the life she lived. Her life was a commitment to the poor in the Australian community. She opened schools and encouraged many young Australian children to further their education. The Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, remarked on Mary’s life at a fund raising dinner leading up to the canonisation event.

“Mary Mackillop’s work of course went well beyond education. She advanced the cause of social justice, working unceasingly for the homeless, the marginalised and the destitute. Hers was a life of devotion and sacrifice. But also a life of adventure, determination and resilience. This is a saint who rides horseback for days under the searing Australian sun, just to visit a few isolated Sisters, who has grit under her fingernails and sweat on her brow.”

Here surely is an example, right before our eyes and in our own nation, of a woman who heard the Word of God and acted. Here is a woman who built her house on the firm foundation of trust in God. In fact, St Mary of the Cross was known to have said herself, “Lean more on God and less on ourselves.”

And in the footsteps of St Mary of the Cross, have followed many other Australian women, who continue to live out the gospel in the communities and parishes of this country. Some of these women were honoured in the photographic exhibition which toured many Australian parishes in 2010. There are women working in isolated rural centres who keep alive the sense of community when there is no ordained minister present, women who take communion to the sick or isolated, women who sit with the dying, or support those recently bereaved. There are women working as St Mary of the Cross did in schools across the nation, to bring spiritual and academic support to students. There are women in hospitals caring for the sick. There are women who support others simply because they are in need at the time.

This week as we celebrate the centenary of International Women’s Day, let us pause and give thanks for the work of women in this country and indeed across the world. Let us give thanks for women who have seen a need and been moved to act to meet that need. In the words of the prophet Micah, may each one of us hear the word of God, take it into our heart and soul in order that we might ‘act with justice, love more tenderly and walk humbly with our God.’

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Did you know that:

- Gender equality is a critical factor in development. Because the wellbeing of women has such a fundamental effect on the wellbeing of their communities, there is a growing recognition of the need to place women’s empowerment at the centre of development plans. “There can be no development, and no lasting peace on the planet, if women continue to be relegated to subservient and often dangerous and back-breaking roles in society”.


- Many countries have reformed laws that discriminated against women in employment and unequal pay in the workplace. Nevertheless, women in all sectors are paid less than men – in developed countries, they earn 77 cents for every dollar men earn and, in developing countries, only 73 cents, according to the World Bank. Lower lifetime earnings also decrease retirement savings, leaving older women and widows especially vulnerable to privation in old age.

  The World Bank 2001 www.unfpa.org
Prayers of General Intercession

Priest: We are called to take to heart and act upon the Word that we have heard. In the faith we share, whether strong or struggling, let us turn to our God in confident prayer.

For the family of the church:
That we might listen attentively and act upon the word proclaimed.
In faith we pray.

For the nations of the world:
That we might be courageous in promoting the dignity of all.
In faith we pray.

For this gathered community:
That together we might build on a sure foundation by respecting and encouraging the gifts of each person.
In faith we pray.

For all women:
That, as we celebrate International Women’s Day, we might support and encourage those who have been more than hearers of the word but have acted upon the call to justice in our world.
In faith we pray.

For the oppressed and suffering:
That we might be strong in upholding all whose rights and dignity are challenged by prejudice and ignorance.
In faith we pray.

For the sick, including N..............:
That our love and prayers might be a source of strength and healing.
In faith we pray.

For those who have died, including N..............:
That the generous sharing of their gifts within family life, society and the church might be blessed forever in the presence of our God.
In faith we pray.

Priest: Hear us, O God, as we celebrate the precious gifts of women throughout the world. Hear us, O God, as we make these and all our prayers through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Resources

- www.cacw.catholic.org.au
Since 1911 International Women’s Day has been celebrated as the global day connecting all women around the world and inspiring them to achieve their full potential. This day is an opportunity to reflect on the dignity and role of all women; in the family, society and the Church.

The Report on the Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia, *Woman and Man One in Christ* (Macdonald et al, 1999), highlighted dominant characteristics of perceptions concerning the participation of women in the Church. These included:

- love of and commitment to the Church;
- concerns for the future of the Church, especially in relation to the alienation of young people;
- agreement that there be no unjust discrimination against women in the Church on the basis of gender;
- recognition and affirmation of the great contribution of women to the Church in Australia. (p.393)

In celebrating the centenary of International Women’s Day we pray that we, the Church, ensure that women are encouraged to flourish within the Catholic Church in Australia and that all women are appreciated for their contribution.

**Ideas for celebrating the contribution of women in your parish**

- Offer a blessing during the Mass for all the women who contribute in various ways to the life of the parish
- Take the opportunity to name the many ministries in which women are involved
- Organize a morning tea following Mass where the women are served
- Identify and honour women who contribute to the leadership of the Parish and society
- Organize a gathering such as a breakfast or after-work function and invite a motivational guest speaker to reflect on the significance of International Women’s Day
- Invite a woman to offer a reflection acknowledging positive developments in the role and status of women
- Establish a group in the Parish to look at how women’s participation in the Church can be increased
- Offer a mini-retreat for women
- Establish a women’s prayer group
- Send a special invitation to young women in schools to be part of the Mass honouring women

**Did you know that:**

- Education is important for everyone, but it is especially significant for girls and women. This is true not only because education is an entry point to other opportunities, but also because the educational achievements of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations. Investing in girls’ education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty.

www.unfpa.org

**Suggested insert for parish bulletins**

This parish kit has been produced by the Bishops Commission for Church Ministry and Council for Australian Catholic Women.

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