



Women on the Frontline Newsletter

Kinshasa, DRC, 2019

August 2021 | Edited by Jane Namurye

Foreword

This is the first edition of Women of the Frontline (WFL) newsletter since WFL's establishment nearly five years ago. In the last five years WFL has ministered to Bishops' wives, the Mothers Union, and women leaders from across the Anglican Communion and other denominations e.g. Melanesia, Burundi, Sudan & South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. These visits have all been led by "Mama Canterbury", Caroline Welby, and her zeal and commitment to work with Bishops' wives and women from across the Communion is phenomenal.

This year the pandemic has not deterred the work of WFL. Although we have not been able to make any in person visits, we are pleased to share that, despite the inevitable difficulties with connectivity in the world of zoom and technology, we have had three online reunions with Melanesia, Burundi and South Sudan and Sudan together.

WFL continues to have a unique opportunity to minister to women, support and encourage their personal relationship, reconciliation to God through Christ and facilitate training to equip them to carry out their role. Our work enables these women to share their experiences with others, breaking down their sense of loneliness and providing a supportive environment for spiritual growth and healing. The ministry of Women on the Frontline has impacted positively in the various contexts across the Anglican Communion. These visits usually last between three and five days. During this time, we get to know each other, before starting with the retreat led by Caroline Welby. This is then followed by reconciliation training led by Sarah Snyder. The team is fully involved supporting both parts of the ministry and helping with art, drama and in prayer.

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MELANESIA

In September 2018, Women on the Frontline visited the Diocese of Central Melanesia to provide a time of retreat and spiritual refreshment for Bishops' wives. The former Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Melanesia, Rt Revd George A. Takeli, invited Caroline Welby and the team to run the retreat, followed by reconciliation training.

12 wives of the Bishops and 10 women participated, with support from the Provincial Mothers Union President, key members of religious orders, the community of the Sisters of the church, and the Coordinator of the Christian Care Centre. In this culture you are given a traditional warm welcome and asked to speak at any time, particularly to bring greetings from Lambeth Palace and Archbishop Justin.



Despite the pandemic, the presence of WFL continues to be felt in Melanesia. Mary Vunagi - wife to David Vunagi the Governor General in the Solomon Islands and former Archbishop of the Diocese of Central Melanesia - has since conducted retreats and reconciliation training to wives of bishops and clergy throughout the Anglican Province of Melanesia.



Mary, our WFL facilitator in Melanesia (pictured, right), has played a significant role working with Bishops' wives there:

"Since we are going to extend the WFL programme to the dioceses, I have been working on a guideline adapted from the 'Practical Reconciliation' notes, to help guide bishops' wives and those who will be supporting them in their dioceses.

Most participants may not be confident writers, so we try to do more artwork, and drama using the Solomon Islands' Pidgin English, or the most common language of that region." - Mary



| Online Reunion |

WFL values the importance of sustaining relationships, which is why we initiated online reunions throughout the pandemic, on zoom as well as via WhatsApp and telephone calls. In January 2021, we held a joyful online reunion with Mary and 8 other spouses. Although time was short, it was a great encouragement for us all to be able to meet up, share news and pray together, especially during the pandemic. Following the reunion, Mary is continuing to accompany the new Archbishops and Bishops' wives through the work of WFL.

BURUNDI

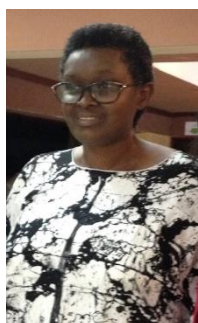
“Amahooro”, meaning ‘peace’, is a common greeting in Burundi. Dressed in their Mothers Union attire, Mama Emilienne, the Archbishop’s wife, bids farewell to Caroline after the WFL visit to Burundi in 2018:



In various contexts, women expressed the need to be trained in skills including confidence building, group facilitation, trauma support, family reconciliation and strengthening of relationships. WFL tries to nurture key women as mentors to the next generation of reconcilers, by training them to share their skills with others in their dioceses and communities.



Yvette Inamahoro (*pictured below*), wife to the Bishop of Matana, is a pastor herself. Yvette says the Biblical passages WFL used in the retreat and reconciliation training have helped her personal spiritual growth:



“I use the skills I learnt from WFL to reach out to other women in my diocese and I have seen husbands and wives who had separated come together - the reconciliation training has helped to unite and bring harmony in families” - Yvette

| Online reunion |

On 21 January 2021 we had an online reunion with 9 bishop’s wives, including the Archbishop’s, with the invaluable assistance of Claudette - the Provincial Mothers Union coordinator.

Despite considerable technical challenges with zoom, we managed to have a successful reunion. Again, it was a great encouragement in the time of the pandemic. The reunion helped us to grow and strengthen our relationships.

Another bishop’s wife in Burundi, Leonie Nibona, shared that after the visit of WFL she’s been able to conduct a retreat and reconciliation training in her diocese of Muyinga, where the women have continued to meet, share testimonies and pray together every month.

Leonie has also developed WFL’s use of art as a tool to restore broken relationships, by making baskets together from a local resource in Burundi:

“The women in my diocese use crafts as a mechanism to enhance practical healing and building of relationships which have been strained”



SOUTH SUDAN & SUDAN

WFL has visited South Sudan on two occasions. The first was in November 2017, and the second in November 2018 - both during House of Bishops meetings. The particular challenges faced in South Sudan, where some bishops wives are in-country whilst others are in neighbouring countries and even in refugee camps, made these visits especially meaningful.

On both occasions, Mama Suria (wife of the Archbishop of Sudan) was able to attend alongside Mothers' Union coordinators, mobilised by Mama Harriet. Other ecumenical leaders joined our 2017 meeting, and in 2018 the majority of the Bishops' wives were able to attend.

South Sudan is an incredibly diverse region, with more than 50 dioceses. Practical reconciliation in our sessions helps encourage the spouses to build strong relationships across these cultural and religious divides, offering hospitality to one-another and seeing themselves as sisters.



As well as reconciliation training, the retreats are a means through which the Bishops' wives can receive hospitality, spiritual nourishment and rest from their day to day roles, enabling them to participate and reflect in the bible study texts.



"I was paralyzed with fear when my husband become the Archbishop of the Episcopal church of South Sudan.....The retreat and training [WFL] conducted in 2018 has strengthened my prayer life and I have since gained a lot of confidence as a bishop's wife"

- Mama Joyce (above), wife of Archbishop Justin Badi



Mama Lucia, a Mothers Union member who received trauma healing training in Rwanda after a WFL visit in 2017, is continuing to run reconciliation training with Mama Joyce in Juba. The pandemic has not deterred Mama Joyce in doing her work with women, using skills she gained from WFL. In May 2021, she led a trauma healing workshop with Archdeacons' wives and Mothers Union leaders from five Archdeaconries in Juba (below).



| Online reunion |

Despite difficulties with zoom, and participants joining from various locations, we had a fulfilling time praying together and encouraging each other in this challenging season.

"Since we last met, the wives of Archbishops have been busy mobilizing and conducting prayer meetings and workshops for women in the camps and at the Dioceses. I am also doing the same here in Juba.

Thank you for the encouragement you gave us. There is much hardship here, but we continue to give hope and courage to the women "

- Mama Joyce

Mama Joyce hopes to start holding retreat days with the spouses in South Sudan, to enable the Archbishops and Bishops wives to get to know each other and pray together, prior to gathering at the Lambeth Conference.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

DRC is one of the largest countries in Africa and still recovering from a series of conflicts that broke out in the 1990s. In September 2019, WFL had a five-day meeting with 13 Bishops' and Archbishops' wives from across the DRC, and the wives of the Archbishops of Congo and Cameroon.

Caroline led the 2.5 days retreat using an Ignatian approach which enabled the participants to connect deeply and personally with God, as they reflected on their own calling and their personal walks with God through deeply traumatic and often lonely times. Again, art and drama gave them the time and space to find themselves in their very busy lives. Prayer, both collective and one-one, underpinned and flowed through all we did.



This was followed by another 2.5 days focusing on each woman's role as a peacemaker, beginning with the personal and familial, before exploring how to be an agent of reconciliation in community. 14 Mothers Union Community Development Coordinators from across the DRC joined, as well as an ecumenical group for ½ a day.

"I ask God to help me to teach other women like pastors' wives, to have their own time with God."

– feedback from one bishop's wife, after the retreat

"I would like to go back immediately and train others. I will focus mainly on the pastors' wives, the MU leaders, not forgetting women like us from other communities."

– feedback from a bishop's wife after the training

Follow up is still ongoing in the DRC, and it is hoped that we will be able to arrange a zoom meeting soon, technology allowing.

| Prayer Support for Women on the Frontline |

We would be so grateful if all our supporters could join with us in providing prayer support, in particular for:

- The daily challenges and hardships faced – from food shortages, poor health care, the ongoing Covid pandemic and other illness, to fear for the safety of their families, friends, churches and selves.
- The women's work all across the Anglican Communion, especially the retreats and reconciliation workshops being run.
- Ongoing support and funding so that the retreats and workshops can continue to grow.
- Confidence to lead this work and have the resources to do so.
- Good connectivity for communication: between WFL and the Bishops' wives (for future reunions, the toolkit roll out, and mentoring) and between Bishops' wives and other women in their respective provinces and dioceses.

| Supporting Women on the Frontline |

The work of WFL has only been possible because of the very generous support from J.C. Flowers Foundation, Lambeth Partners, Anglican Communion Fund, friends and well-wishers. We are so grateful for this support, and would like to say a huge thank you for all their help in enabling not only past visits but those planned for 2023.

It is our prayer that WFL retreats and training will continue to grow across the Anglican Communion, through our mentorship model and toolkit being developed. If you would like to become a friend of Women on the Frontline yourself, and help us support the spouses and the Mothers' Union in this ministry, whether with prayer or by making a donation, please contact the WFL team at wfl@lambethpalace.org.uk

To keep up to date with future activities of WFL, please look out for our next newsletter.