

The Bible Women's Program: "Making Old Things, New"

* 다음은 2005년 5월 Nashville, TN에서 열렸던 한인여성교회 전국훈련에서 해외선교를 담당한 여성국 직원 Karen Prudente가 전체 모임에서 "복음의 여성들"이란 제목으로 한 강의 원고이다.

Christian Women Bringing Social Literacy to their homes, churches, and communities

What do you see in this picture?

How do you feel about this picture?

What does this picture mean to you?

How are the things in this picture brought about?

If it needs change, how can we make it different?

The first three pictures are from manuals which we use as "codes" to start discussions with women on issues which they have selected to learn. From these questions and pictures, we learn a simple methodology called FAMA: Facts, Association, Meaning and Action developed by Pro-Literacy Worldwide (formerly Laubach Literacy), an international grassroots literacy organization which the Women's Division has supported and partnered sharing their methodology in Asia-Pacific, beginning in December 2000.

In 1999 the Women's Division engaged a consultant, Ruth Prudente to do a research study on Bible Women. The research looked into the course study from its beginning. The earliest was a 6 - month training course given by the first two female missionaries. Later other missionaries helped in teaching courses. Several Bible schools and institutes were established with 2- and 3-year courses of study. Before World War II, the four-year deaconess course in the Philippines replaced the Bible Women's course study. Today the Women's Division provides one-week intensive "Train the Trainers" workshops followed by 2-3 day trainings given by a selected group of local women trainers and monitored by Women's Division Regional Missionaries.

The Bible Women's program began over 136 years ago when our predecessor Methodist churches were beginning its work in India. Several indigenous women were selected before the decision to send the first two women missionaries Isabella Thoburn, a teacher and Clara Swain, a

doctor. In their 6-month program, Isabella and Clara trained these women to read the Bible, sing hymns and tell Bible stories so that they could assist them as they went into the Zenanas, women's quarters where men were not allowed.

Through time Isabella Thoburn opened the first Christian women's college in Asia and Clara Swain established the first women's hospital in Asia. Their Bible women students also became teachers and nurses who began churches, clinics, and schools in remote areas of India. Bible Women became a movement through the support of the Women's Societies in the United States, wherein the program expanded into China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Sarawak and the Dutch West Indies (Indonesia).

Today's Bible Women are ordinary women with leadership qualities. Their selection comes from recommendations of their women's organizations, their community leaders, their pastors, or through ecumenical seminaries where wives of clergy are being trained.

Kim Han is one of our leaders among the Methodist women in Cambodia. She lives northwestern part of the country which is a nine-hour trip on bumpy roads from the capital city of Phnom Pehn. She is a farmer and has an experimental farm where she grows various plants and trees, has a fish pond and raises pigs so that she can also teach the women in her community these farming techniques as well as the various modules of social literacy. She also assists the newly formed Cambodia Methodist Women's Association in developing programs such as the sewing program for girls in order to keep them at home where it is safer rather than earning a daily wage of 10 cents at the Thai border. She also teaches Bible studies and traditional Khmer dance with the children and women of her church.

Hileria Panjaitan is the daughter of the first Indonesian Methodist missionary to the Iban Sarawak community. She married a local Iban boy and has raised her four children as Iban Sarawakan Malaysians. She recently retired as a Math professor and is devoting her time in visiting the longhouses with nurses and doctors and with her sisters from the Sarawak Iban Methodist Women. Most of the longhouses are three to five hours upriver. Longhouses are similar to apartment buildings with one long hallway where 40-50 doors lead off to separate

family quarters. Our women go from house-to-house or door-to-door to provide spiritual counsel. In the main hallway, they teach programs on basic health, nutrition, parenting and vocational skills along with Bible studies and songs. Since December 2001, each Christmas at least 100 people are baptized and accept Christ as their Savior at these long houses. Hileria has assisted the Women's Division in its expansion work as a trainer in Indonesia and the Malaysia Tamil Conference in Kuala Lumpur. She also translated several of our modules into Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Indonesia.

Rev. Erlincy Rodriguez is a deaconess and pastor in Davao located in the southernmost island of the Philippines. Via motorbike she travels three hours through mostly Muslim territory to visit and train women in her communities. She works with indigenous women and also has been asked by the district village chief to train 200 health educators using the FAMA methodology. Here are some of the women who have been trained to go to their communities. Erlincy has also trained other Bible women in Cambodia and the Philippines.

Pro-Literacy Worldwide has social literacy modules which through the support of United Methodist Women and the Women's Division have been translated for the first time into 22 languages. The modules are on Basic Health and Nutrition, HIV-AIDS, How to Start a Business, Parenting Skills, Peace and Conflict Transformation, Civic Education and the Environment. We have trained more than 1,500 leaders in 10 countries who teach women, youth, children and men their churches and local communities.

The Bible Women program spans several countries in Asia and the Pacific: India, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Tonga, Fiji, Samoa and Solomon Islands. Expansion is planned in Asia for Vietnam, Sri Lanka, and Thailand and in Africa: Angola, Mozambique, Gabon, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Senegal, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, DR Congo, Zimbabwe and Cote D'Ivoire.

Recently the Wisconsin and Minnesota Conferences supported the Hmong-American UMW trainers to Laos. This spring the Korean UMW from the New York Conference held a walk-a-thon as part of their retreat to support the Bible Women's work among Sarawak Ibans in Malaysia. They raised about \$3,000 while having fun and enjoying the beautiful mountains. How can you help?

This program is supported through pledges from United Methodist Women in its Undesignated Giving program and long-term gifts. Our women need tools of their trade: manuals, bibles, training workshops. These ordinary women need assistance to supplement their very poor incomes to help improve their daily living. Thus, providing funds for a pregnant pig and a well, chickens and a coop, seeds and garden tools, a weaving loom and thread, mushroom sprouts, fish for a fishpond, and funds to purchase basket weaving materials will enable these women to put food on their tables, send their children to school with books, uniforms and shoes, and have emergency funds when someone gets sick, give thanks to God through offerings at church and support their local women's organizations. Local women work as a group so that they have a support network while the Women's Division finds a local partner organization to provide the technical assistance required by the women trained.

You can give your gifts through your local unit UMW treasurer or you can send a check made out to the "Women's Division". You can send your check through Rev. Heasun Kim or the Women's Division, Office of International Ministries, 475 Riverside Drive #1504, New York, NY 10115. If you have any questions, you can call or e-mail Rev. Hea Sun Kim or Karen Prudente.

Thank you for loving our neighbors through your prayers, through your passion and energies in sharing about their needs and through your generous gifts of support. May God continue to be with you as take the journey of faith with our Bible Women around the world! □