



Make this year's Share Lent a Commitment to seek
a world free from poverty, violence and oppression!

Hunger Meal

Pro-Cathedral Parish Hall

Friday, ^{*}April 7 after the 12:05 PM Mass

Solidarity Stations of the Cross in Cathedral at 5:00 PM

**WOMEN
AT THE HEART
OF CHANGE**



Share
Lent 2017

Come out and share solidarity with those who try to survive each day without the basic necessities of life. Voluntary Donations accepted.

~ Proceeds to Development & Peace Share Lent Collection ~

Everyone Welcome!

“Women at the Heart of Change” is this year’s theme for the Share Lent Campaign of the Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (Caritas Canada).

What is a Hunger Meal? A “rich-poor” meal of plain fare (soup & bun) which raises awareness and solidarity with those around the world who often go without basic necessities. Everyone is invited: Families, single people, married couples, children, grandchildren.

A faith-based reflection on *Women at the Heart of Change*.

Around the globe, every day, there are women and men who work together to transform their lives and the lives of their communities. They steward the natural world around them and advocate for a fairer, more just world. Many women, like Risya Syair, use their talents to change the perception of women in society. Others, like Hanan Halima, are entrepreneurial and create activities that support low-income families. Recognizing these efforts, and allowing these women to “glean” is part of our call as Christians to journey toward justice. This call, as we see in the book of Ruth, is the promise of God. God, the provider to the orphan, the widow, the stranger and all the poor (Deut. 10:18, Psalm 146:9), turns His gaze to women who are oppressed and shines His light upon them.

If we also turn our gaze in this way, we can see the challenges that women face around the world. In Afghanistan, only 18% of adult women are able to read and write, compared to 45% of adult males. Eighty-seven percent of women confess to experiencing domestic violence. The United Nations and the World Health Organization report that women aged 15-44 around the world are more at risk from violence than from cancer, and up to 70% of women experience violence in their lifetime. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a country where women are the target of systematic sexual assaults, we are witnessing a normalization of sexual violence. Thus, an estimated 48 women are raped per hour. Such horrifying statistics call us to pause.

Resisting against such sexual and gender-based violence is often hampered by impunity, when the rule of law is either unknown or ignored. Judicial and social constructs often further demonize the victims of such systemic violence and promote the practice of “victim blaming.” In contrast, we have the example of our Lord who defends the adulteress against the violence of the law itself (John 8:1-11). We must courageously put love and mercy first and stand with victims to give them a voice and a place at the table instead of shaming them into silence.

Additionally, there are many parts of the world in which women are denied economic opportunities, and barred from participating as equal partners in the building and transformation of their communities. Women have less access to banking services, a gap that is largest in countries in the Global South. Development and Peace – Caritas Canada is working with partners around the world to transform these situations and address the root causes of such injustice. Inspired by Gospel values and strong in the knowledge that all persons have God-given dignity, we support women and men, but especially women in their search for social and economic justice. We do this because we are moved, and challenged to do so by our faith.

This recognition of equal participation is a standard of Catholic faith, and is uniquely tied to our teaching on complementarity, which refers to the unique and fruitful relationship between women and men. Both are created in the image of God and both have great dignity and worth. As such, there are no ascribed and rigid gender roles, but rather an understanding that the recognition and equal participation of both women and men in cultural, social, economic and political life helps us journey towards a fairer world. As Pope Emeritus Benedict noted on January 19, 2013 during his address to the Pontifical Council, the “reciprocity between male and female is an expression of the beauty of nature as willed by the Creator.” From this teaching, we can and must move beyond the simple framework of individual marriages, and see within it the context of our global communities so that we move towards the moral conversion so strongly called for in *Laudato Si'*.

We must understand this in a radical way. The true beauty of the teaching on complementarity is not the justification of unequal power relationships between men and women, but realizing their equal partnership. As Pope Francis noted to the bishops of Puerto Rico, “such differences are not for opposition or subordination, but for communion and generation, always in the image and likeness of God.” Such a teaching, which celebrates and uplifts both man and woman, defies those who try to subjugate women or who find ways to physically, psychologically and economically harm them. Such offenses are inconsistent with the notion of having “equal personal dignity.” In this way, we are not only thinking of women, but also of men. When we call men to integrity, and when women and men work together to establish strong economic and social communities, we also work towards resisting the social structures that oppress us all.

Christ, in “making all things new,” proclaimed a new humanity. This new humanity is found in the complementarity of women and men working together, and by doing so, resisting the logic of domination and profit that pits men against women, parents against their children, class against class, and race against race. We do not walk towards a kind of glib universalism where our differences and unique talents disappear into sameness. We walk together in solidarity and in a crowd of voices that insist on reform and dialogue, and that speak prophetically against social injustice. The equal recognition of both women and men becomes a tool for liberation. This is because the task requires the leadership of women, their unique talents and their ability to empower other women. Part of these unique talents is the understanding of injustice that women bring with them from their very own lived experiences.

What does it really mean to put the lives of women at the heart of the action? It means recognizing them in their God-given dignity as equal and unique partners alongside men. Putting women at the heart of the action engenders the real fruit of liberation, and underscores the Good News of salvation. Just like Mary, may we treasure that Good News and ponder it in our hearts.