

## MORAVIAN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

HOME AND OVERSEAS

FEBRUARY 2014

### WOMEN'S WORLD DAY OF PRAYER SERVICE: FRIDAY 7<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2014

(written by the Christian Women in Egypt)

**Theme - 'Streams in the Desert'** (Isaiah 44:2-4)

When Egypt was invited to write the service for this year back in 2007, nobody could have possibly foreseen the dramatic events of the last 3 years or that they would be so in need of our prayers when this service takes place this year. We have received news from the Egyptian World Day of Prayer Committee through our international network and we keep our eyes and ears tuned to the media for what is happening there.

Egypt is the last stronghold of Christianity in the Middle East and is one of the oldest civilisations of the world, often referred to as the 'motherland of the world' and 'cradle of civilisations' at different times. Throughout the ages, Egypt has been a refuge, the most famous refugee being Jesus himself escaping from Herod, and we remember the stories of Joseph and his brothers and Moses from the Old Testament. But today it is still a place of refuge for asylum seekers coming from North African countries such as the Sudan and, most recently, Syria.

#### **Life-giving water:**

What better theme for this service than that of 'Streams in the Desert'! Egypt has always depended on the great River Nile for its survival and 95% of its population of nearly 85 million live in the narrow central fertile strip of the Nile valley. Cairo is the largest city in Africa with twice the population of London (around 16 million), whilst the Port of Alexandria is the second largest. It was in Alexandria that the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew to Greek. Of course, we know that the rest of Egypt consists of desert, a large part of which is the Sahara Desert — the world's largest desert — and very hot and dry. For those who still live in the rural and more arid areas of the country, life can be very hard, with no networks of assistance and support to draw on. Lack of water has a huge impact and open wells and canals are often polluted, whilst millions of Egyptian children are born into poverty with malnutrition leading to lifelong health problems. Health care is free, but hospital facilities are very poor. Whilst 95% of the country's water comes from the Nile, the river is shared with ten other countries: Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, South Sudan and Sudan. The water usage is regulated between the countries but the distribution of water can lead to conflict.

#### **Ancient ...**

Most of us will remember learning about the Ancient Egyptians at school (and probably have children and even grandchildren doing the same)! It was a remarkable early civilisation of the world. Egypt's most famous landmarks are the Great Pyramids, built between 4000 and 2700 BC which was the time of the Old Kingdom. This was followed by the Middle Kingdom and the time of Abraham; the New Kingdom with its most famous Pharaoh, Rameses, and Joseph and the journey of the Israelites to Egypt. Following this was the Late Age when the country was conquered by Alexander the Great and he built his capital of Alexandria.

### **and Modern:**

But in more modern times, the people of Egypt have experienced many changes. For the Christians it has often led to uncertainties, to persecution and violence. The country has suffered, or benefitted, under different occupation and government up to the present time. During President Mubarak's reign corruption in government grew, the economy failed and unemployment increased, which paved the way for the 'Arab Spring' in 2011. Following this, new President Mursi's promises of liberty, justice and equality led to disillusionment and violence, particularly for the Christians who were often made scapegoats for people's anger and discontent. Now, once again, they are hopeful that the coming new charter will bring better days. Part of this new constitution enshrines the right to religious freedom for all 3 Faiths; Judaism and Christianity as well as Islam.

What is the future for the people of Egypt? There is joy and anger, hope and distrust, and there is water and thirst in Egypt today. Out of the basic need for survival or in the midst of conflict, a living water flows like streams in the desert. As the Samaritan woman offered her bucket, we offer our sisters in Egypt our informed prayer and prayerful action, with the faith that it will bring peace and justice to them.

Wendy Hoperoff