

MORAVIAN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

HOME AND OVERSEAS

FEBRUARY 2015

WOMEN'S WORLD DAY OF PRAYER SERVICE – FRIDAY 6th MARCH 2015

(written by the women of The Bahamas)

Theme – Jesus said to them: “Do you know what I have done to you?” [John 13:1-17]

As we come to this year's service, you may be forgiven for conjuring up thoughts of white sands and turquoise sea under blue skies and a golden sun and wondering what the women of The Bahamas could be asking us to pray for in such a paradise-like destination for holiday-makers and cruise-takers. Perhaps all is not quite as idyllic as it may first appear and we need to look a little deeper into what it is really like for those who live there. For those of our sisters from the Caribbean, many things may sound familiar!

As one of only two countries in the world officially prefixed with the word 'The', The Bahamas consists of 700 islands and thousands of small islets, or 'cays', spread over 100,000 square miles of the Atlantic Ocean, yet the total land mass is only 5,380 square miles – which is about the size of Wales. The two main islands are New Providence and Grand Bahama and the rest are called 'family' or 'out' islands. With the varying beautiful shades of sea colour between the islands, which also include the world's third largest barrier reef, the name 'Bahama' is particularly apt as it means 'shallow sea' in Portuguese.

The Bahamas is an English-speaking, independent nation of the British Commonwealth with a parliamentary government based on the Westminster system with our Queen as it's head of state, having gained full independence within the commonwealth in 1973.

Tragedy, Piracy and Slavery - the history of the The Bahamas includes all this and more.

The first Europeans arrived with Christopher Columbus in 1492 as his expedition was seeking a route from Spain to India and before that the islands were inhabited by some 45,000 Lucayan and Arawak Indians. Sadly, in a few short years many of these had died from diseases brought over by the Europeans and between 1509 and 1511 the entire surviving population was enslaved and shipped to Hispaniola to work in the gold mines.

The archipelago remained virtually uninhabited until 1647 when the Puritans from the English colony of Bermuda landed on the island they named Eleuthera – meaning 'freedom' in Greek. Other English settlers established colonies on New Providence and founded Nassau, as it is known today, and a period of relative peace began. But this was not to last.....

Throughout the 17th century the islands became a base for pirates from which they attacked the French and Spanish ships, and then in turn became a target for French and Spanish marauders seeking control of the Caribbean islands. Remember 'Pirates of the Caribbean'? There really is basis in the truth!

The 18th century slave trade brought many Africans to The Bahamas. Slaves resisted both individually and also collectively, in the slave revolt in 1829 - long after slavery was abolished by the British Parliament in 1807, for it continued to be permitted in the territories with a licence.

To The Present – What are we praying for?

The women's suffrage movement finally secured the vote for women in 1962 but there is still progress to be made. Violence against women, including sexual assault, is on the increase today even though laws against domestic violence have been approved. The Church and many women themselves still believe that the husband has a right over his wife's body and, as recently as in 2010, a law that would have protected a wife from being raped by her husband was rejected. Women's organisations and church women are working hard to raise awareness and to educate communities about the signs of domestic violence, marital rape and child sexual abuse.

Migrancy from the nation of Haiti on the island of Hispaniola is a growing problem. Those who have been living in extreme poverty in Haiti migrate in overloaded sailboats which sometimes capsize before reaching the islands, killing many of their passengers. Volunteer groups and organisations are helping to provide meals and care for children, but the numbers keep increasing.

Education and health are seen as a vital key to progress and the government supports both these areas well. Schooling is compulsory, much the same as here, with scholarships which can be offered to enable students to study abroad in order to acquire vocational skills. However, many of these students never come back to live in The Bahamas. The whole economy of the islands is dependent on that of the US and the tourist/cruise-liner trade and a recession there affects all the inhabitants directly or indirectly, as many struggle to provide for their families in the outer islands.

Care is still offered by many volunteers for those with AIDs and HIV as there is still a great stigma attached and sufferers are often shunned by their families. Of great concern today is the increasing incidences of breast cancer and prostate cancer, and more education for the promotion of breast-feeding is needed, particularly in the Family islands, as less than one quarter of babies is solely breast fed at 4 weeks.

So, beneath the tourist glamour, these are the concerns we must share with the women of The Bahamas and pray for them and all their needs as we come together for the service they have prepared for us.

Wendy Hopcroft