

Wonder Women! Then and Now

There are many countries in the world where women are undervalued and treated like second class citizens. There are many more countries where women suffer in violent relationships, are forced into prostitution and are victims of sex trafficking. We hear about many of these situations through the World Day of Prayer Service information that we receive and although things are changing there is still a long way to go. Sr Jane Dixon always wears something black on a Thursday to show that she supports the women's movement that is working towards a world without rape and violence. Wearing black on Thursdays shows others that you are tired of putting up with violence, and calls for communities where we can all walk safely without fear; fear of being beaten up, fear of being verbally abused, fear of being raped, fear of being discriminated against. The campaign recognizes that violence takes many forms including domestic violence, murder, genital mutilation, sexual harassment and sex trafficking. 'Thursdays in Black' focuses on ways that individuals can challenge attitudes on a personal and public level and is supported by individuals, churches, denominations and organizations worldwide. Sr Jane has been wearing something black on Thursdays since 2005 when she was serving as chair of the planning committee preparing for the Consultation in 2008. The theme that year was 'Valiant Women in a Violent World'.

The Moravian Women's Unity Desk, based at Winston Salem in North Carolina, offers financial support to many women, girls and children and provides scholarships for education, studying and setting up business projects all aimed at helping women and giving them a higher profile in their own societies.

Malala Yousafzai was born in Pakistan in 1997 and is an activist for female education. Her family ran a chain of private schools in North West Pakistan and were her inspiration and role models. At the age of only eleven she started writing a 'blog' for the BBC using a pseudonym. It detailed her life under the Taliban in which she recorded 'How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education?' The Taliban had, at times, banned girls from attending school but she defied this and fought for her belief that during her lifetime all girls would be able to attend school. In 2012, whilst returning home having just taken an exam, she and two friends were shot at in an assassination attempt in retaliation for her activism. Malala was hit in the head by a bullet, was unconscious and remained in a critical condition for some time. When her health improved sufficiently, she was moved to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, UK. The attempt on her life attracted international support and the Taliban were consequently internationally denounced by governments, human rights organisations and feminist groups. In 2014, at the age of 17, Malala became the youngest recipient of the Nobel Prize. She is still an active worker for female education today and is currently studying for a degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Oxford University. She is truly a wonder woman in our time! I am sure her actions and those of many others will eventually bring change.

For discussion;

1. Are we strong enough to stand up for what we believe to be right today?
2. Discuss how you feel about the protest marches at the moment.

Diane Thornton