



# The Circle Newsletter

No 7. December 2006

The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians

## Panel Honouring Mercy at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion

### Sarojini Nadar writes:

On Sunday, 19 November 2006 a special topics forum was convened in honour of the work of Mercy Amba Oduyoye at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion held in Washington DC, USA. The forum was sponsored by the Status of Women in the Profession Committee. The theme of the panel discussion was “Women Speaking to Religion and Leadership: Honouring the Work of Mercy Oduyoye.”

The session was attended by over 150 people, who enthusiastically listened to the panellists paying homage to the work of Auntie Mercy and her contribution to the field of African Feminist Theology. They were Letty M. Russell, Yale University; Katie G. Cannon, Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education; Sarojini Nadar, University of KwaZulu-Natal and Musa Dube, University of Botswana. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, of Trinity Theological Seminary, Ghana responded. The session was lively and engaging with each panellist first paying homage to Auntie Mercy personally, explaining in-depth the effect she has had on their lives individually and then moving on to delineating the significance of her scholarly contributions to the academic world. Letty Russell started off the panel focusing on the question of what it means to be a good leader and what it means to be a woman leader, concluding that Auntie Mercy has indeed blazed a trail in the area of women’s leadership. Katie Canon delivered a beautifully poetic paper focusing on what it means to be woman and Black particularly in the light of slavery and colonialism. Sarojini Nadar spoke of Auntie Mercy’s particular “malaka-le” brand of theology and its implications for the ways in which the women in the Circle name their theologies. Musa Dube concluded the panel with an impressive analysis of the Circle and its writings and particularly the mentorship model of the Circle in general and of Auntie Mercy’s nature in particular.

Auntie Mercy concluded this vibrant session by capturing the audience even further through her lively, engaging storytelling – telling the story of the Circle and singing the tune of her dreams and visions. The session ended with people feeling so moved by the work of Auntie Mercy that an “offering” was taken



Mercy Oduyoye speaking at the AAR Conference

and US\$1500 was collected toward the Talitha Qumi Center in Ghana. The *festschrift* for Auntie Mercy entitled: “African Women, Religion, and Health – Essays in honour of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri & Sarojini Nadar, and published by Orbis in 2006 was also very well marketed at this session, and Orbis reports that the whole carton of books which they brought for sale was sold and they even had more orders for the book.

Finally, of course, no celebration is complete without singing, and even in a serious academic setting like that of the AAR meeting, in true African style, the audience could stand up and break forth in resounding voices to the tune of “Africa will be saved.” And with that the Circle had indeed made its mark on the AAR.



Panel honouring Mercy Oduyoye at AAR Conference:  
Katie Cannon, Sarojini Nadar, Musa Dube and Mercy Oduyoye

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# From the Circle Office

## *Dear Sisters in the Circle,*

Festive season greetings and a blessed 2007 from the office of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa! Most of you who are in the academic world will be going on long summer vacation. Others will go on short festive season vacations. This is the time to de-stress and lay aside your burdens of 2006. Make an effort to enjoy yourselves while you can.

## ***Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians Pan African Conference***

Plans for the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians Pan African Conference are going ahead. The Circle Executive had a meeting at Kempton Park Conference Centre from 2-3 December 2006 to make concrete plans for the conference. Felicidade Cherinda, our Lusophone Research Coordinator was not present because she was recovering from stab wounds sustained at the beginning of November 2006. Please continue to pray for her.

## ***Joint Conference with World Council of Churches***

The Circle Executive accepted the WCC's (Health and HIV unit) proposal to host a joint 2007 conference. The executive decided that it was beneficial to both the Circle and the WCC, for several reasons, to host a joint conference, not least of which was that the themes each are working on overlap considerably. It therefore does not make sense to have two separate conferences with similar themes in the same year. Furthermore and most importantly given the funding situation, financially it is more viable for the two organizations to have a joint conference budget. It is important to note that most donors are against funding conferences, especially of this magnitude. One budget and the same donors is economical.

This will be the first time that the Circle will have a joint conference at a Pan African level. However, at consultation levels the Circle has had joint meetings with WCC. For example, the "On Being Church: African Women's Voices And Visions" consultation held from 10th to 15th October

2003 in Johannesburg was organized by the Circle in partnership with World Council of Churches, Justice Peace and Creation Team under the leadership of Aruna Gnanadason. In addition, the consultations on "Engendering Theological Education In Africa," which were held in Johannesburg in July 2004 (for the Anglophone region) and in Togo in October 2004 (for the Francophone region) were held in partnership with World Council of Churches, Ecumenical Theological Education under the leadership of Nyambura Njoroge. The Ecumenical HIV&AIDS Initiatives in Africa organized several meetings in partnership with the Circle which includes the following: 2004 November workshop on writing sermons and prayers in Maputo for the Lusophone Circle; Writing workshop for the Rwanda Circle led by Musa Dube from 31 July-4 August 2006; and the consultation for the Anglophone Circle in Johannesburg, 2-6 July 2006 etc.

## **Conference dates and venue**

The new dates for the conference are now 2 September (arrive) – 8 September (departure). The agreed Conference venue is Yaoundé Faculty of Protestant Theology. Due to financial constraints, it was agreed that the list of participants would be as follows:

- ♦ 80 participants plus 20 partners from the Circle side.
- ♦ 50 participants from WCC side.
- ♦ 50 day participants from local Cameroon Circle and theologians
- ♦ Total of 220 participants.

The executive agreed that the 80 Circle participants would comprise the following:

- ♦ 35 people from the Anglophone region
- ♦ 25 from the Francophone region
- ♦ 10 from the Lusophone region

The selection of the Circle participants will still be based on acceptance of an article for publication in the pre-conference publications. My understanding is that at this stage the articles are with the regional research coordinators who have set up a team of editors to look at the quality of the articles. The books or at least the manuscripts will be ready by the September conference. If there will be more than 80 publishable articles, they will still be published even though not every contributor

will go to the conference. In such a case, date of submission of full papers will be used as a criterion for choosing who goes to the conference. We will also consider those who are able to pay for their own way to the conference. If you are in this category, please let me know. In case we are able to raise more money than our budget, we will increase the list of participants.

As a reminder, all Circle participants will pay registration fees of \$25 per person.

## **Overview of Tentative Draft Program (Devotions every morning)**

- ♦ Sunday, 02 Sept – Arrival
- ♦ Monday, 03 Sept – Circle Business Meeting
- ♦ Tuesday, 04 Sept – Circle partners plenary and parallel panel presentations (1/2 day)
- ♦ Tuesday 04 Sept – Excursion in the afternoon
- ♦ Tuesday, 04 Sept – Afternoon/evening (Circle/WCC) opening ceremony
- ♦ Wednesday, 05 Sept – WCC led focus on children & HIV
- ♦ Thursday, 06 Sept – CIRCLE & WCC – women and girl child
- ♦ Friday, 07 Sept – Circle & WCC – ways forward, communiqué and closing ceremony etc
- ♦ Friday, 07 Sept – Evening Departure
- ♦ Saturday, 08 September – Final Departure

A detailed programme will be included in the April 2007 Circle newsletter.

## **Circle Draft Constitution**

Thank you very much to those of you who sent comments on the Circle draft constitution. At the meeting of the Circle Executive of 2-3 December 2006, the Anglophone and Francophone Regional research coordinators submitted comments received so far. More comments will be received from the Francophone and Lusophone Research coordinators. The 2nd draft of the constitution, which will incorporate comments from the three regions, will go out with the April 2007 newsletter. Comments on the second draft are to be received by 31 May 2007, for inclusion in the 2007 Pan African Conference programme book. Please make sure you participate in the creation of this constitution.

## ***Election of the Next Circle Leadership***

This is a reminder that the new constitution will be used at the 2007 Circle Pan African conference to elect the next Circle leadership. I want to encourage you again to familiarise yourselves with the procedure, pray about it and approach the people whom you think should be your leaders. It is very important to plan for the next Circle leadership in advance.

## ***Circle Publications***

Unfortunately Fulata Moyo and Lilian Siwila have lost most of the information on the Anglophone and Lusophone Circle profiles due to a computer virus. Please bear with them if they ask you to resend your profile. The Francophone profiles are being compiled from Madagascar. Josefina Sandema and Eva Gomez have been requested to help with the Lusophone profiles.

The final Circle Directory will be out by July 2007. If your details are wrong or if you have joined the Circle after the 2006 Circle directory was out, please contact Beverley Haddad at [haddad@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:haddad@ukzn.ac.za) with your new details. In case you did not receive the 2006 directory, please check the one which is posted on the Circle website, which you can find at [www.thecirclecawt.org](http://www.thecirclecawt.org).

Check the Circle website for regular updates on the 2007 Circle Pan African conference.

We plan to update the website regularly.

No new Circle book has come off the press since the April 2006 newsletter. However, I am aware of several manuscripts being prepared for publication before the 2007 Pan African conference. More news about these publications in our next year's newsletter.

## ***Circle Partnership with Yale Divinity School and the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS***

I regret to inform you that the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS application for mentoring Circle researchers did not receive funding. This means that no more Circle members will go to Yale University as faith fellows until we have found new donors. Letty Russell, Margaret

Farley and Kari Hartwig have continued looking for funding elsewhere.

In the meantime we rejoice with Lilian Siwila (Zambia) and Bongiwe Dumezweni (South Africa) for having successfully completed their four months of study at Yale University as faith fellows. This brings to 12 the number of Circle members who have benefited from this partnership. I am planning for a special publication from the contributions of the faith fellows.

## ***Representing the Circle at meetings/conferences/workshops and consultations***

Sometimes I get invited to meetings/consultations and conferences to represent the Circle. At other times I am invited in my personal capacity but I still use the occasion to speak about the Circle. In the following short paragraphs, I shall share with you some of the meetings/workshops/



*Some members of the Circle – EHAIA joint meeting at Kempton Park Conference centre, July 2006*

conferences and consultations I attended from June to December 2006.

a) From 20-22 June 2006 I was one of the Core Group on Bossey that met at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Switzerland to discuss the future work of the institute and the integration of the work on Ecumenical Education and Formation within the World Council of Churches. This is important to the Circle because a good number of us have received our theological/religious studies education through the sponsorship of WCC. It was also significant that one of the workshops for the 2007 academic year at the Bossey Institute will be Bible studies on Violence against women. Sarojini Nadar will be one of the people running the workshops. I would also encourage our sisters who want to do a Masters Degree in Ecumenical Theology with the University of Geneva, to apply for the 2008 academic year by visiting

the Institute's website.

b) From Geneva I went to London to attend the Langham Scholar Consultation from June 29 – July 1, 2006. This was held at Highbury Centre. Some of our Circle members who come from an Evangelical tradition have received their theological sponsorship through Langham. The Langham programmes include scholarships, Literature and preaching. Check their website, <http://www.langhampartnership.org/scholars/> to find out if you qualify to apply for their scholarship programmes. Their emphasis is that you must be studying towards a PhD, which you will use to teach at a theological institution in your country.

c) From London I stopped in Johannesburg to briefly attend the joint meeting of the Anglophone Circle and the Anglophone section of theological consultancy of the Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa from 3-4 July 2006. Musa Dube has given a very good report, whose short version is included in

this newsletter. The longer version of the report will be published in a book, which Musa Dube is editing. This is a very good report as it evaluates a small sample of the Circle writings in the field of HIV and AIDS. It is worth paying attention to as we map the way forward for the Circle at the 2007 Pan African Conference.

d) Then while I was on a one week holiday in Malawi, Rachel Fiedler organized a re-launch of the Zomba Chapter of the Circle. What was significant

about this re-launch is that the Department of Theology and Religion, University of Malawi, accepted to host the Zomba Chapter of the Circle. My experience in the Circle has shown that it is the Circle chapters which are housed within theological institutions that tend to be very active and live long as they become a forum for the Circle members who are on the staff to mentor students who are members of the Circle to write for publication. It is a model that I would like to encourage.

e) Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians: Women's Commission Workshop was held at Kempton Park, Johannesburg, South Africa from 22nd – 23rd July 2006. The theme of the workshop was "A New World and Theology: Contribution from Feminist, Womanist and Mujerista Theology". Other members of the Circle who were present at this meeting included: Philomena Mwaura (one of the organisers), Mercy Oduoye, Teresia

Okure, Madipoane Masenya, Margaret Umeagudo, Margaret Gecaga, Sophie Chirongoma and Puleng Lenkaba. This workshop was followed by the general assembly of EATWOT, which I did not attend due to other commitments. The organizers reported that this was the first meeting of EATWOT



*Isabel Phiri and Musa Dube at the University of Lesotho*

where women outnumbered men. If you are in the academic world and not yet a member of EATWOT, I would encourage you to visit their website <http://eatwot.org/> and find out how you can be one.

f) The All Africa Conference of Churches and The Conference of African Theological Institutions held a Pan African Theological Consultation in Nairobi, Kenya from 7–12 August 2006. The consultation theme was: “Strengthening theological thinking for the African renaissance”. The consultation communiqué stated: “Issues we deliberated upon within the context of African renaissance were: African theology, promotion of responsible leadership for wealth creation, pro-poor economics, Christianity and the Church in Africa, healing and reconciliation, development paradigms, ecology and integrity of creation, ethical concerns relating to information communication technology, brain drain, and the impact of demoralizing statistics on Africa. We sought ways of strengthening theological thinking and action for the realization of the African Renaissance for the betterment of the people of Africa.” Other Circle members who were present at this consultation included: Mercy Oduyoye, Philomena Mwaura, Esther Mombo, Eunice Kamaara and Agnes Abuom. I think this meeting raised important issues that the Circle should be paying attention to in our writings. Anyone interested in a full report on this consultation please contact me so that I can email it to you. After the consultation we had a Circle meeting with some of the Circle members from Kenyatta and Moi universities to plan for the 2007 Circle Pan African conference.

g) The Women in Theology seminar was held at the University of Lesotho, Roma on 25th August 2006. The seminar was organized by Paul Leshota, a staff member

in the Department of Theology and Religious studies, who is a champion of gender equality. We need more African male theologians like Paul to work with the Circle in our theological institutions. Musa Dube and I were the speakers of the day. Musa Dube’s presentation was entitled “Talitha Cum! A postcolonial feminist and HIV&AIDS reading of Mark 5:21-43” and my presentation was on “The challenges faced by female students and Academics in Theological Education”. In the afternoon we introduced the Circle and talked about writing for publication. This consultation was well advertised as it was attended by staff and students from different sections of the university. It was wonderful to hear students say, “After this seminar, I am no longer ashamed to be called a theology student”. After this seminar, the Roma Chapter of the Circle was born under the coordination of Mahali Phamotse. <mahali\_phamotse@hotmail.com>

h) The International Reference Group of the World Council of Churches’ Ecumenical HIV/AIDS Initiative in Africa met in Kinshasa from 29 September to 3 October. This meeting gave me an opportunity to hear reports on what EHAIA is doing to help the churches become HIV and AIDS competent on the African continent. It also gave the Circle a chance to finalise plans on how to collaborate with EHAIA on projects that address gender

issues, in dealing with the faith communities in the context of HIV and AIDS. I also had an opportunity to hold two meetings with Circle members at the Protestant University in Kinshasa. I thoroughly enjoyed their hospitality as they treated me to a Congolese *quinsigne* and showered me with presents.

i) I was one of the several Circle members who attended the American Academy of Religion in Washington DC, USA from 19 to 21<sup>st</sup> November 2006. The reason so many Circle members were present at this meeting this year was because the focus of the AAR meeting this year was on Africa. I am glad to report that the presence of African women religion scholars was noted and felt at this important meeting. Sarojini Nadar has already reported on the Circle highlight, which was the celebration of Mercy Oduyoye. To my disappointment, I was not part of the celebration because I was on another panel that was going on at the same time. Such is the nature of these meetings that hold parallel sessions. Despite the busy programme, we managed to squeeze in time for a Circle meeting with some of the Circle members in the Diaspora. Thanks to Teresia Hinga for making this possible. If you are in the academic world and have not yet gone to these mega conferences, find out how you can be a member <http://www.aarweb.org/annualmeet/default.asp> and attend the 2007 annual conference. This is where you buy academic books at a reduced rate, you meet publishers of theological and religious books and you network with other scholars in your discipline and keep abreast of the latest information for research in your field. Although it can be overwhelming because of its magnitude, it is worth attending. Apply early to get sponsorship for African women!

j) I completed my international trips by attending the Council for World Mission General Secretary’s Reference Group meeting in London from 11 to 12<sup>th</sup> December 2006. What I found to be very important for the Circle to take note of is the planning for the celebration of the Centenary



*Some members of Kinshasa Circle*

Edinburgh 2010 where the Ecumenical movement will be celebrating hundred years of Christian mission. As theologians we will be reflecting on how mission was done and is currently done and how it should be done. We should be raising the gender perspective of mission. I am hoping that as we plan the way forward for the Circle at the 2007 Pan African conference, we will include our participation in the Centenary Edinburgh 2010 celebrations.

Sharing with you all this information makes me realize how hard I am pushing myself. Hence, I am one of those people who argue that the position of the General Coordinator of the Circle should be full time and remunerated. Let me stop here so that I can take some weeks off to go on vacation!

*I remain yours in the Circle*

**Isabel Apawo Phiri**

*General Coordinator: Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians*

## Training Report

**(Sent by Dorcas Olubanke Akintunde, Ph.D)**

I arrived in New Haven for training at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research on HIV/AIDS on August 22, 2005. The first week was for registration and orientation. Lectures started on August 31, 2005 at the School of Epidemiology and Public Health. The two courses taken during the Fall were Community Health Program Evaluation (GHD 541A) and Gender Health and Globalization (GHD 543). The two courses provided adequate basic knowledge required for the training. At the Yale Divinity School, I registered for African American Moral and Social Thought, (REL 825). This provided the theo-ethical perspectives of selected African American Christian and humanist thinkers. I presented my research proposal titled, "An assessment of the potential of National Christian Women's Groups to Implement HIV/AIDS Prevention Programs in Nigeria". My mentors were Prof. Letty Russell and Dr. Kari Hartwig.

In the Spring of 2006, I registered for Community Health Planning (GHD 542B) at the School of Epidemiology and Public Health and two courses at the Divinity School – Sexual Ethics (REL 880 B); Feminist Liberation and Feminist Pastoral



*Dorcas Ankintunde at Yale University with Margaret Farley*

Theologies. (REL 743). The contribution of these courses to the program cannot be overestimated. The readings for the courses were adequate and these have been beneficial. During the Fall, my proposal was peer reviewed and necessary revision was done; the project was approved on March 16, 2006 by the Human Subject Committee of the Yale University. The Institutional Reviews Board of the University College Hospital, Ibadan Nigeria similarly approved the project on May 4, 2006.

Upon my return to Nigeria, I will begin my teaching assignment as a Senior Lecturer in New Testament at the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan. I have already designed two courses: HIV/AIDS and the Church in Africa and Women in Biblical Milieu and in Contemporary African society for students at the Graduate level, which will be taught in the next academic year. The courses offered during my training both at the Divinity School and the School of Public Health and Epidemiology have provided adequate knowledge to lunge into the teaching of these new courses. I have greatly benefited from the program and specifically the short courses on Introduction to HIV/AIDS taught by Dr. Dubrow, Qualitative Health Research Workshop, by Kevin and Ethical Issues in HIV/AIDS Research by Dr. Khooshnood. The various Yale AIDS Colloquium Series (YACS) seminars were of immense benefit as well as the web-based ethics training.

On the whole, my stay in Yale University has made a great impact on my perspectives about the issue of HIV/AIDS, and other public health issues, and has contributed immensely to my academic career. The environment was very conducive for academic work and the facilities provided were adequate. I am using this forum to thank the Center for Interdisciplinary Research on HIV/AIDS for offering me admission to this program. Thank you so much.

## Report on the Ecumenical and Interfaith Pre-Conferences

**("Faith in Action: Keeping the Promise"), 10-12 August 2006 and the XVI International AIDS Conference ("Time to Deliver"), 13-18 August 2006, Toronto, Canada.**

**(Sent by Ezra Chitando,**  
Ecumenical HIV/AIDS Initiative in  
Africa (chitsa21@yahoo.com)

"Our God is more powerful than AIDS." – *Gideon Byamugisha at the Ecumenical and Interfaith Pre-Conferences.*

"Today we mourn the dead. Tomorrow we fight for the living." – *Grace Edward Galabuzi at the Symposium: "HIV/AIDS in the African/Black Diaspora: Addressing the Hidden Epidemic."*

"Hope spreads faster than AIDS." – *Global Fund slogan (www.theglobalfund.org)*

"In the first instance, what most of the western world fails to understand is the range of knowledge, sophistication, solidarity, generosity and sheer, unbridled resilience at the grass-roots of the continent, particularly amongst the women. We underestimate Africa; we always underestimate Africa." – *Stephen Lewis writing in a special edition of the Ottawa Citizen, Sunday August 13, 2006, p. A2.*

"Let us not impose our values on the Africans. Nobody imposes their values upon us." – *Fr Michael Czerny on the need for sensitivity on sexuality in HIV and AIDS discourses.*

### "Faith in Action"

Both the Ecumenical and Interfaith Pre-Conferences were highly significant and informative events. They demonstrated the sad reality that HIV and AIDS has provided a unique opportunity for ecumenical and interfaith interaction. Individuals from

diverse faith traditions came together to deliberate and strategise on the challenges brought about by the epidemic. The image of the red ribbon decorated by symbols of various religions was, and remains, a powerful one indeed.

The workshops and plenary addresses offered valuable insights into the extent to which faith-based organisations (FBOs) have become key players in the overall response to HIV and AIDS. The variety of the skills-building workshops confirmed that FBOs have come a long way after the initial inertia. Peter Piot, Executive Director, UNAIDS, acknowledged that FBOs have become an integral part of the response to HIV and AIDS. However, much more remains to be accomplished.

The EHAIA duo of Jacinta Maingi and Ezra Chitando, with Manoj Kurian, ran two workshops on "The key role of religious leaders in overcoming stigma." Charles Klagba stood in for Sue Parry in the workshop on "Equipping faith leaders and their local congregations to break stigma and implement multi-dimensional responses to HIV and AIDS." This was run in co-operation with World Vision International and ANERELA+. Christoph Mann presented in the workshop on "Ecumenical experience in developing theological materials." Tania Zarraga ensured the dissemination of World Council of Churches publications at the Pre-Conferences and the main conference.

While FBO's have covered appreciable ground in their response to HIV and AIDS, the Pre-Conferences brought some issues to the fore. Farid Esack, founder of Positive Muslims and professor at Harvard, challenged delegates to refrain from regarding HIV and AIDS as providing opportunities to enhance careers and attain financial benefits. He bemoaned the "NGOisation" of HIV and AIDS by some FBO's. It was also clear that representation of religious leaders at the Pre-Conferences was not balanced. African Traditional/Indigenous Religions continue not to have a place at the high table. Furthermore, the high visibility of FBO's at the Pre-Conferences should be transferred to the main conference. However, the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance and the Christian Host Committee (Canada) should be commended for the efficient organisation of the Pre-Conferences.

### **"Time to Deliver"**

The XVI International AIDS Conference (IAC) provided up to date material on the state of research on HIV and AIDS. During

plenary sessions, experts in the various fields shared information on the advances that have been made. Of interest (to this author) were developments in research on microbicides, male circumcision and treatment. Speakers characterised this time as a phase of renewed hope, although they admitted that millions continue to die due to lack of access to life-prolonging drugs. There were some powerful addresses by activists from civil society. The time to deliver is NOW, they averred. Alongside the deliveries in the halls, the "global village" showcased numerous organisations that are responding to HIV and AIDS. Cultural activities complemented the addresses. Musician, Thomas Mapfumo from Zimbabwe called upon Africans to be ideologically conscious as they reflect on their vulnerability to HIV and AIDS.

Most presentations conceded that the "key drivers of the epidemic" like poverty and gender inequality had to be addressed if the response to HIV and AIDS is to be more effective. Responses had to be broader than the ABC model. Notable personalities like Bill and Melinda Gates, Bill Clinton and others acknowledged the economic disparities that fuel the epidemic. However, one wonders whether those in privileged positions are willing to work for the radical transformation of the world (dis)order.

Overall, many of the panellists (and their agendas) were from Europe and North America. The panel on male circumcision brought the skewed distribution of power into the open. Although this prevention strategy will be targeted at black African males, only white males (and one African woman) presented papers. Similarly, a session that acknowledged the role of grandmothers took place when the African grandmothers who had attended the Pre-Conference had already left for the continent. Tellingly, the voices of FBO's, so striking at the Pre-Conferences, were barely audible. There is also the risk of "re-medicalising" HIV and AIDS as social scientists and specialists from other disciplines were absent.

As I see it, the way forward lies in ensuring that personalities in the FBO's attain higher profiles in HIV and AIDS discourses. This would literally "force" organisers to include them in the main programme, e.g. as leading ethicists, women's empowerment champions, etc. Furthermore, such individuals should seize the opportunity and locate themselves firmly within the tradition(s) of FBO's.

In conclusion, the XVI IAC demonstrated that there is hope in the response to HIV and AIDS. As communities realise that we are indeed a world living

with HIV and AIDS, there is need to continually evoke the prayer of the World Council of Churches 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14-23 February 2006: "God, in your grace transform the world."

## **News from Circle Chapters**

### ***Cape Town Circle - Cape Town Circle Re-launches***

**(Sent by Miranda Pillay)**

The Cape Town Circle was re-launched on Thursday, 20 July 2006 at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). This was indeed a spectacular event as sisters (and brothers) from around the Cape Town area were able to attend this exciting event. Circle members from the Universities of Cape Town (UCT), Stellenbosch (US) and UWC attended. Honoured guests included Profs. Denise Ackermann (former chairperson of CT Circle Chapter), Elna Mouton (Faculty Dean, University of Stellenbosch), Stanley Ridge (Vice-Rector of Academic Affairs, UWC), and George Fredericks (Dean: Arts Faculty, UWC).

Denise Ackermann delivered the keynote address. She provided a brief overview of the historical developments of the Cape Town Circle, since it was first launched by Isabel Phiri and Sr Arine Matsotso in 1991. Miranda Pillay concluded the evening's proceedings by expressing her gratitude to all present and in particular she also acknowledged Denise Ackermann for her inspirational leadership.

The re-launch of the Cape Town Circle creates an opportunity for the three academic institutions (University of the Western Cape, University of Stellenbosch and University of Cape Town) to collaboratively provide mentoring and encourage writing theology towards publishing. This vision is inspired by the successful way in which the Pietermaritzburg Circle is operating.

***Report on the Consultation  
of Women Theologians from  
All Protestants Churches  
Member of the Circle of  
Concern African Women  
Theologians (Rwanda  
Chapter) Kigali: 31 July - 4th  
August 2006***

(Sent by The Rev. Thérèse Mukamakuza, Presbyterian Church in Rwanda, Kamuhoza Parish, P.O Box 2885 Kigali. RWANDA, Tel: (00250) 08672800, Email: mukamakuza@yahoo.com)

### The Program

The Consultation brought together 25 women from protestant churches members of CPR. The majority of the participants were ordained priests, leaders of congregations, chaplains in schools or teachers of religion. Others are working in various departments in their churches or students in theological schools.

The major objective of the consultation was to support my initiative to start the Rwanda Chapter of the Circle as a speaking space for Rwandese women theologians to do research in order to publish a book in our context. In addition to Prof. Musa Dube's questionnaire which was sent to those who attended the Addis Ababa conference asking what we have done so far, Prof. Dube voluntarily agreed to offer us technical assistance on writing. During the writer's workshop of five days, women were taught how to use mainstream Gender and HIV/AIDS in Biblical Interpretations, in Church Worship, in Care giving, and in situations of violence, peace and reconciliation.

We thank God that all these objectives were achieved at this workshop. Participants presented outlines which they intend to develop into publishable articles. The participants commented on each other's outlines.

As observed by Prof Musa Dube in her email after the consultation, the majority of Rwandan women theologians who are in church ministry did not complete their theological studies because shortly after the genocide they were recalled from studies to work in the church as ministers so that they can take over the work left by men who were more victimized by the war. Very few women completed their first degree in theology. None were able to continue their studies up to Masters degree. This makes it difficult for these Circle members to contribute their theological reflection through writing.

In addition there is a great need for short courses which can be centered on leadership, peace and reconciliation, violence, and mainstreaming HIV/AIDS into Church Ministry e.g. in preaching, care giving etc. As one who has started this initiative, to bring Rwandese women theologians together, and has encouraged them to write, as a way of creating the space for them to speak, I am so happy with the

step we are making so far. The consultation with Prof Musa Dube has proved to Rwandese women that being in Church Ministry as a priest is not the only way to work for the Kingdom of God, but also they have a role to play in helping people under their leadership in the fight against gender based violence, injustice, HIV/AIDS, illiteracy, etc. This will be possible through the production of useful publications in their own context. Women have chosen leaders considering their geographical areas, and we hope that this will help them in their strategies of working as a team.

We are also seeking funding from anyone who can assist us so that we can have similar workshops every year and for the publication of the book that will come from this workshop.

We were very grateful that the legal representative of CPR represented by Mr Rwambonera Francois closed our consultation and handed over certificates to the participants. In his speech he promised that CPR is also ready to support the Circle.



Dorcas Ndoro, Limunuru

Personally I am thankful to God even if I have not done much but I have lived to see some of the hopes and aspirations come true. The dance continues. I am grateful to Dr. Jenny Tepaa for the support she has given all round, Bodies such as Langham Trust for financial assistance and others but much more the spirit of the Circle that has impacted on those of us who want to see patriarchy dismantled in theological Education.

*Thanks sisters and the dance continues.*

**Esther Mombo, St. Pauls, Limuru.**

✉ *Dear Dr. Isabel,*

It was a pleasure to meet you at the Assembly in Brazil, though I could not enjoy your company because we were all very busy. I would like to thank Dr Dorcas Ankitunde for sending me regularly the news of the Circle. She is a very good research coordinator. God bless you both.

I would like to share with you some news about myself and others I work with:

As a member of the Women's Program of the Middle East Council of Churches, with the other members of the Program: we are working on women issues in Egypt. We usually hold two conferences a year; one in Upper Egypt, and the other in Lower Egypt, in addition to a yearly Conference for the Egyptian Woman – including Muslims as well as Christians.

At present we are preparing for a conference to take place in Alexandria (in Lower Egypt) in November. It is on "Violence Against Women". We will have a very famous Orthodox Priest to give the theological perspective, and a Protestant woman speaker for the rest of the topic. The participants are about one hundred from both sexes.

Moreover, my daughter who is a Consultant on Gender and Human Rights issues for UNICEF and other Organizations, and has her own Consultancy Office, is now implementing training workshops for UNICEF in Upper Egypt. She has good experience in this field, and deals with grassroots women as well as with trainers and social servers, but not necessarily Christians.

On the other hand, I am busy preparing for the new academic year for my Institute of Coptic Studies, where I – as a Professor of Theology – teach dogmatic theology to

## Announcements & E-mail Correspondence from Circle Members

✉ *Sisters,*

One of the aims of the Circle was to increase the number of women doing theology to help them obtain higher degrees and my joy from the St. Paul's Circle chapter is that in a small way we have tried to meet that. We are dancing today because the number of our women students doing theology is 60 at St. Paul's. While funding is a pain, God has helped me to raise funds to subsidise their fees either in full or in part. I am grateful to all of you because you have helped. This year alone the chapter has witnessed five women finish their MA degrees both here and abroad.

Five enrolled this year for MA and PhD.

BUT MOST OF ALL TWO COMPLETED THEIR PhDs. They are: Rev. Dr. Emily Onyango and Rev Dr. Dorcas Ndoro. Emily is teaching at St. Paul's Limuru. Dorcas will be coming to Kenya and we will let you know what she will be doing.



*The Rwanda Circle (see page 7)*

Post Graduates. It is a good opportunity to approach women students and know their views and encourage them to express them.

Concerning having a group having the same concerns of the Circle (a chapter), I hope you send me a membership form to distribute among those interested. I also ask some more information about the requirements for membership.

Best wishes to you and everybody in the Circle, and hope all your work will be a success.

*Sincerely yours,*

**Wedad Tawfik** <wedadt@yahoo.com>

✉ *Dear Sister Isabel,*

Thanks for the very rich Newsletter recently distributed. I know God will surely come to our aid financially for further publications of the Newsletters. This is to let you know that I have been promoted to Prof. of Philosophy of Religion with effect from 2004. I was also able to include STUDIES IN HIV/AIDS in the General Studies Course offered by every first year undergraduate student of my University. This was made possible when I was made Director of General Studies 2002-2004.

*God bless you.*

**Sister Celestina Isiramen,**

Head, Department of Religious Management and Cultural Studies Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria.

✉ *Dear Isabel,*

I'm writing this from Javier, Spain, at a conference of Homecoming and Encounter marking the 500th anniversary of the birth of Francis Xavier. My presentation was this morning and some of what I said at the Annual Pope Paul VI Memorial Lecture organized by CAFOD (Catholic Agency for Overseas Development) flowed into this morning's presentation. Details of the

CAFOD presentation on "Impoverished by Wealth: Mama Africa and Her Experience of Poverty" can probably be found at the CAFOD website. I have yet to access the site myself.

Please note my yahoo address: tokureshcj@yahoo.co.uk. It is much easier to access through the cyber cafe than the AOL one. By degrees I will be closing the AOL altogether. After Spain I have another one in Rome for the Gender Working Group (GWG) of Caritas Internationalis as their Theological Adviser.

*God bless us all,*  
**Teresa Okure.**

- ☉ Sarah Simons is informing all Circle sisters that **NEGST Circle chapter** was created on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2006 under the Coordination of Sicily Murrithi. Congratulations!
- ☉ Congratulations to **Felicidade Cherinda** for having successfully completed her BTh honours degree at the University of Pretoria in South Africa.
- ☉ **Delphine Etoua** has successfully completed her PhD in Pastoral Theology and graduated on 30th June 2006 at the Faculty of Yaounde, Cameroon. Her PhD topic was "Pregnancy Interruption in Africa and Pastoral Concerns". We all join Nyambura Njoroge in saying "Congratulations! It is my prayer and hope that the churches and theological education institutions will make good use of your findings and the skills you have acquired". [etouadelph@yahoo.fr](mailto:etouadelph@yahoo.fr)
- ☉ We should continue to pray for **Denise Ackermann** who is recovering from chemotherapy treatment.

## *Background to the Circle*

The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (hereafter the Circle) was inaugurated in 1989. In the year 2006, the Circle registered 616 members on the continent and abroad, distributed as follows: 465 Anglophone members; 93 Francophone members and 59 Lusophone members. The criterion for membership is the commitment to research, write and publish on issues affecting African women and women of African descent.

The Circle is the space for women from Africa to do communal theology based on their religious, cultural and social experiences. It draws its membership from women of diverse backgrounds, nationalities, cultures and religions rooted in African Indigenous Religions, Christianity, Islam and Judaism. It encompasses indigenous African women and seeks to relate to African women of American, Asiatic, and European origins. These concerned women are engaged in theological dialogue with cultures, religions, sacred writings and oral stories that shape the African context and define the women of this continent.

### *Mission Statement*

The mission of the Circle is to undertake research, writing and publishing on African issues from a women's perspective.

### *Vision*

The vision of the Circle is to empower African women to contribute their critical thinking and analysis to advance current knowledge. Theology, religion and culture are the three chosen foci, which must be used as the framework for Circle research and publications.

**Please share with us what is happening in your life and in your Circle Chapter! Send your items to Professor Isabel Phiri or to your regional Research Coordinators. Contact details for *The Circle Newsletter*:**

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