

World Day of Prayer event taking place in Shelburne

Written By **MARNI WALSH**

On March 1st, women in more than 170 countries and 2,000 communities across Canada will gather to pray, to learn and to celebrate their faith for World Day of Prayer (WDP.) The event is an annual global movement founded in the early part of the last century, which brings Christian women of many traditions together on the first Friday of March to observe a common day of prayer.

“We forget so often that there is a wide network of people all over the world who believe in prayer, the power of it, and the importance of it,” says Rev. Candice Bist of the Shelburne Primrose United Pastoral Charge. “I think it is wonderful that women throughout the world help us remember that.”

In Shelburne, all the churches gather together with one host church leading the event. Participants learn about the lives of the women of the host country who create the service. This year the global event is led by the women of Slovenia and locally hosted by St. John the Evangelist Catholic Parish which holds their services in the sanctuary of Trinity United Church in Shelburne.

“A sanctuary is just that - a place of sanctuary, a place of safety, a place where we can gather with our deep questions, our intimate concerns,” says Reverend Bist. “And sanctuary is not confined to one denomination, nor one faith, nor even formal faith, really. I love the idea that we can have different approaches to faith, and that in a sanctuary we can express it differently.”

Slovenia has continued to be the most politically open country of the former Yugoslav republics since declaring independence in 1991. The women of Slovenia have built this year's theme around the bible study of Luke 14, verses 1-2: “Come, Everything is Ready.” As is the tradition, it is also the women of Shelburne and area churches, rather than the clergy, who have come together to plan the March 1st day of prayer, including Elisabeth Leikermoser, Margaret Finlayson and Ruth Cruikshank.

Elisabeth Leikermoser says, “This gathering is, for me personally, very meaningful; it connected me with local women of the Shelburne area, since I moved here only after my working life. Through preparation and participation in the worship service, women worldwide learn how their sisters in other countries, languages and cultures understand the biblical passages in their context.”

Ruth Cruikshank says, “The Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada (WICC) provides leadership about reconciliation and living peacefully.” As a member of the ecumenical social and environmental justice group, Dufferin Kairos, Ruth Cruikshank says, the group has the same goals as WDP - “to share knowledge so we can work for ‘reconciliation’ for all people. Ruth Cruikshank says she is “looking forward to learning about Slovenia and the importance of bees and the role honey has in meeting dietary needs.” Margaret Finlayson, of St. Paul's Anglican Church, also stresses the importance of participants “praying together about environmental issues, poverty and human rights’ concerns.”

Regrettably, Rev. Candice Bist says the service has been poorly attended in the past. “I think that is a shame,” she told the Free Press, “because it is, if nothing else, a time of solidarity, a time to say that quiet matters, that gentle thought on the deeper questions of life matters, that taking time from the hustle of this world, matters, that gathering together in little groups to honour the spiritual practice of contemplation matters. And we should take time to honour that. Christianity, in its truest sense, has always been small, intimate, little in its way, and so, these little gatherings reflect perhaps better than anything, the community of a few who are willing to take the time to stand apart.”

There will be another opportunity to “gather” on Tuesday, March 5th from 6 pm to 9 pm, when Soup Haus serves a Mardi Gras Pancake Supper marking Shrove Tuesday. Traditionally, Shrove Tuesday, or Fat Tuesday, immediately precedes Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, and was considered the last day of “fat eating” in many Christian sects before the fasting period of Lent.

On March 6th, there will be an historic joint service for Ash Wednesday between St. John the Evangelist Catholic Parish and the United Shelburne Primrose Charge. The service will take place at Trinity United Church at 7 pm to mark the beginning of Lent.

"I am delighted that this year Father Paul Vellimoozhayil and I are actually going to do a service together," says Rev. Bist, "and Ash Wednesday is a good one to do, marking as it does, the beginning of the Lenten Season."

"We are so inundated with the press of this world, with its indignities, and avarice and anxiety," says Rev. Bist. "It is counter cultural now to say we're going to take a sabbatical for that for the next six or so weeks - we have decided to calm ourselves down, to do less, to buy less, to eat less, to fret less, and instead to concentrate on the deeper longings within us - longings for understanding, for a sense of spiritual wellness, for restfulness, for internal sanctuary. So, doing that with another faith group is not just talking about what we would like to do, it's doing it."

Shelburne and area women will be celebrating World day of Prayer in Trinity United Church at 200 Owen Sound Street on Friday, March 1st starting at 2 pm. All are invited to join them. Reservations for a complimentary Mardi Gras Pancake Supper can be made at souphausrestaurant@gmail.com or by phoning: 519 217 2151. The joint Catholic and United Church Ash Wednesday service will begin at 7pm on Wednesday, March 6th and all are welcome.