

GROWING *Together*

11th Series

WOMEN: ON THE WAY

Many of us grew up learning these rhymes:

Sugar and spice and all things nice
That's what little girls are made of.
Snakes and snails and puppy dog tails
That's what little boys are made of.

In what directions do these take us?

FROM NORTH AMERICA . . .

Melanie Carpenter. Genevieve Bergeron and thirteen other women who were shot because they were women. The teen in your congregation who is date-raped. The young girl who is abused in a house on your street, perhaps in your family. The need for safe homes in every Canadian city. Women easily branded and dismissed as ranting feminists. Ten Days for World Development, its 1995 focus on gender and justice. Where are we heading?

. . . TO CAIRO . . .

In 1994, the International Conference on Population and Development was held in Cairo. Interventions by the Vatican and other religious organizations were much publicized. However, the real news about that Conference was the strong consensus reached among the delegates about the empowerment of women. While Cairo was not a conference about women, the delegates agreed that when women are illiterate or oppressed, there is no progress for anyone. They also agreed religions are either part of the solution or part of the problem. There is no longer any neutral middle ground.

. . . ACROSS THE WORLD . . .

Neutral middle ground is gone because around the world, women are heightening their influence at all levels of public life. They are doctors, lawyers, professors, business executives and politicians. They are consciously building international links in their public lives. They are also bringing greater awareness to all facets of their private lives. Women in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean are conducting hearings on domestic violence, trafficking in women, and violence against dispossessed widows. In support of these efforts which frequently require

these women – and the men who support them – to put their lives on the line, the UN has appointed a special envoy, Rhadika Coomarswamy. She makes field trips to particular countries every year, investigating systemic violence against women, and recommending measures to be taken at regional, national, and international levels.

Women around our globe are also signing a worldwide “Petition to Promote and Protect the Human Rights of Women.” Over 2000 groups have sponsored this petition including the Arab Women’s Solidarity Association, the World Union of Catholic Women’ Organizations, and the World YWCA. Men and women from 124 countries have already signed it¹. The petition will be presented to the Fourth UN Conference on Women.

. . . TO BEIJING . . .

This Fourth Conference will be held in Beijing in September 1995, building on three previous World Conferences on Women (Mexico, 1975; Copenhagen, 1980; Nairobi, 1985). Violence against women is a major priority of this Conference. Delegates and organizations around the world are now developing strategies for Beijing.²

. . . AND BACK . . .

At the Cairo Conference, Muslim scholar Riffat Hassan urged Muslim women: “Once you know what your rights are and that they are given to you by God, you will never let any man in any society take them away from you.” As Christians, we choose – consciously or unwittingly – what to think of ourselves, of others and of God. We choose what we will see each day as threat or gift.

Little girls (and women) are wondrously more than “nice.” Little boys (and men) are thankfully more than mischievous. Imagine where we might be today had we grown up learning:

Witty and able, caring and stable
That's what little girls are made of.

Tender and bright, refusing to fight
That's what little boys are made of.³

* * *

¹ Copies of the petition are available from the YWCA.

² For information: the Beijing Facilitating Committee, Ottawa, (613) 563-2550.

³ Dr. Lois Wilson, used with her kind permission.

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