

The theme for the World Day of Prayer 2014 is “Streams in the Desert”. The artwork, seen on the homepage, was created by Farid Fadel.

Dear WDP sisters,

As you are aware, the writing process of the annual WDP worship service starts three years ahead of the actual celebration. When the WDP Egypt Committee first met for the preparatory workshop in Anafora in May 2011 guided by Eileen King, the mass demonstrations at Tahrir Square in Egypt on January 25th had started. Following an intense period of protests in the Arab world – known as the Arab Spring – Egyptian people, including young women, went to the streets to voice their desire for justice, freedom and equality. The Revolution of January 25th 2011 meant a political change, as we read in the 2014 WDP resources, expressed by the resignation of then President Hosni Mubarak, and the installation of civilian authority and the hope for a new Egypt. At the moment of final review of the worship service materials in September 2012, Egypt and the USA are at the centre of world attention as protests of an anti-Islamic movie turned violent; not only in Egypt but throughout the Middle East. Both the video and violent protests have impacted people all over the world. However, like streams in the desert, news of religious leaders standing up for peace reflects the deepest source of our faith.

Within the region and worldwide, WDP women are touched by the urgency for prayers and a search for understanding of the context of the violence that escalated in Egypt and in the region. As women of faith, we find strength in our spirituality for peace and in the relationship we develop as we worship together across the globe. Our ability to grow in friendship and respect with the people we get to know through the worship offered to us is one of the gifts of the WDP. You have now received this special gift from our sisters in Egypt at this very crucial moment.

As we study the worship resources from the WDP Committee we learn the long history and cultural legacy of Egypt. A history that starts well before the Biblical times and one that intersects with the history of salvation. We can hear the pride of the Egyptian Committee when they speak about the Church of Abu Sarga where the Holy Family was said to have found refuge in Egypt.

From the Pharaoh’s search for God, and Moses’ cry of “Let my people go”; to Constantine who turned a small fringe religion into the Empire’s religion; and eventually to the arrival of Islam, the WDP Committee of Egypt takes us through the intersections and tensions between religion and government. The Committee also has their eyes on the future and tells us what the Egyptian people and churches are expecting of their future: social and economic justice, peace and security. As they say “It is one of God’s streams in the desert”.

With a sense of humbleness before God, and awareness of human potential to do harm to our neighbors, the WDP Committee begins the worship service with a confession of our trespass and prayer for peace. Oh, God, hear our voices from the deserts in our lives!

Then in the Worship Service we hear the voices of four Egyptian women who eventually use their voices to dramatize the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. This moment offers us an immense opportunity for deep dialogue and reflection about the borders that we, like Jesus and the Samaritan Woman, have to cross to get to the streams of living water.

The streams in the desert, which we see in the artwork that the WDP Egypt Committee offers us, inspires us to think metaphorically within the theme, while the Bible story chosen invites us to think theologically. The Samaritan woman by the well has a theological conversation with Jesus that ends with action like our motto –**informed prayer and prayerful action**. They were able to cross their religious and cultural differences and build a common ground that then empowered her to bring change to her community.

The well is a meeting place. If you have this experience of fetching water in the community’s well, you can understand the

way this dialogue came about. The Bible Study by the Egyptian WDP Committee and the one done by Prof. Ulrike Bechmann at the WDPIC International Meeting in June of 2012, which we will share later with the National Committees, help to build the bridge between the Biblical story and our own contexts. An activity as an alternative for the reflection opens up the opportunity for the streams in the desert to become metaphorically and theologically meaningful to the local ecumenical relationship experienced in the worship service. The Committee suggests some questions to re-imagine the Biblical dialogue in which you are at the well with God's messenger talking about the deserts in which one lives and the streams that bring life. The Samaritan woman leaves her jar behind and goes back with the living water to her community. Your writing on the ribbon is like your conversation that will be left in the jar, while you go out to be in relationship with your community. Communication, relationship, crossing borders, common ground, and spirituality are like the streams that will pour water on our thirsty lands.

As we heard, in Hebrew the word for well is the same for the verb to see. The well is the meeting place to be seen by God and God's messenger who offers the living water! We don't even know the name of this woman theologian, but we know her deed: bringing her community – and through her community us – to the well of living water.

In consultation with the WDP Egyptian Committee we found helpful to add to this letter a press release on ecumenical efforts towards mutual understanding and peace in the region. The first is news of the meeting of the actual president of Egypt – Mohammed Mursi – with church leaders. The other is the Comunique of the Christian Muslim Consultation on Christian Presence and Witness in the Arab World held by the World Council of Churches, in collaboration with the Middle East Council of Churches and hosted by the Armenian Catholicosate in Antelias, Lebanon. Both documents help us to be in a profound moment of prayer with the Egyptian people. Let us be with them at the well sharing the streams of living and loving water to our world community.

Finally, I would like to take to opportunity to say that it has been a joy to walk this process with the WDP Egyptian Committee together with Eileen King. Eileen just retired from WDPIC, and she continues to share her gifts with us. Thanks, Eileen! Also, I want to thank Hannah McIntyre, who is the new Administration and Publications Associate at the WDPIC office. She works directly with each WDP Committee assisting you with the worship materials and sharing your stories through the Journal. Welcome, Hannah! I also want to thank the WDP Egyptian Committee for their diligent work in a critical time for their country and people. Blessings to you all!

Peace,

Rosângela Oliveira

Executive Director
International Committee
World Day of Prayer