



Dear Sisters,

What strange times we are living in! Here we are, half way through the period of Lent, when we recall how Jesus spent 40 days and 40 nights alone in the wilderness, focusing on God's call upon his life. He used that time to work out the direction he should take in order to reconcile the estranged world to a restored relationship with God.



I have just celebrated my 70th birthday. I had such plans. These included attending the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York, then returning home in time for my husband's birthday and a weekend booked with family and friends. All that had to be changed with the new restrictions put in place by the UN and the British Government. I am now advised, as a person over 70 years of age, to distance myself from others even to the extent of remaining at home. Church services and meetings have been cancelled. It is as though I am in a sort of empty wilderness, physically separated from others and a diary that is cleared of commitments. At times I am fearful; at others I feel strangely blessed.

I am discovering that I can spend quality time with God instead of rushing through the business of the day. I am blessed to have the company of my husband and we have taken walks in the beautiful open countryside near our home. I can speak with family and friends on the phone or communicate via Facebook and email. In an extraordinary sense, as I exchange messages with Federation women in every part of the world, I feel even more connected with you than usual.

I sense a miracle of global transformation is taking place.

I have been aware over recent weeks and months that the struggles of people in some countries - Zimbabwe, for instance - have scarcely been noticed by the world at large. We have tended to be so wrapped up in our own concerns that the rest of the world's needs get ignored. We make our own needs the priority and feel unconnected with people in another nation. Indeed, nationalism has been very much on the rise as we know. It is as though we have wanted to be separate from each other, rejecting any thought of mutual care or responsibility for others we do not know personally.

And yet now, in this global pandemic, we find we are connected in a new and significant way. We are advised to keep our distance but in our enforced isolation, we begin to appreciate any connection with each other. We realise that we are all vulnerable to this hidden enemy, the COVID-19. We all have similar emotions ranging from anxiety to gratitude. Even as we face the uncertainty of this situation, we hear of amazing acts of kindness being shown to complete strangers, enormous courage by health professionals, brave decisions being taken by political and church leaders, a new awareness and concern for the most vulnerable in society, and (for Christians) a new appreciation of our oneness in Christ.

The women of Zimbabwe invited us to pray with them for 'Love, peace and reconciliation' on 26th March in a special event to be held at Harare Sports Stadium. This event, planned as a celebration following the recent World Day of Prayer service, has now been cancelled but the invitation remains. So let us celebrate our global unity as Federation women as we think of the women of Zimbabwe, all those affected by the novel coronavirus COVID-19, and use our Federation Prayer. Let us rededicate ourselves to being instruments of God's grace and healing for the world.

The Federation Prayer (*Written by WFMW Executive members, 1986-91*)

Creator God, rooted in your loving care, nurtured through your Son Jesus, challenged by your Holy Spirit, we are in the world to bring peace with justice, reconciliation in love, and hope for all people. May our lives extend as the branches of our Tree of Life, bearing fruit of Unity and Love. We offer praise and thanksgiving through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Every blessing, Alison