

Catholic Mission Media Release

International Women's Day, March 8, 2011

“Listen to the Greater Power of God”

On International Women's Day (March 8) Catholic Mission celebrates the role women play in securing peace and social progress in our world. “We celebrate the far-reaching contribution women make to the social fabric through their work, their nurturing and caring,” said Catholic Mission's National Director, Martin Teulan.

“In developing countries Catholic Mission works with disadvantaged women and girls to support their equality and active participation in society. We assist them to reach fullness of life through faith formation, literacy and numeracy, and their desire for economic opportunities through access to skilled jobs and careers.” said Mr Teulan.

One Catholic Mission ambassador who is emblematic of the passion, drive and resilience of women is Nurse Pasipanodya. Born in western Zimbabwe, Nurse is a strong advocate for the education of girls in the developing world. Education was important in her family, she says. “My father named me Nurse because he wanted me to have a career as a nurse, but I became a teacher instead.” she says.

“When you educate women, you educate a whole nation,” says Nurse Pasipanodya. “With more education there are more resources to help the family. In Africa when a woman marries she is expected to look after her husband's extended family. If she has an education she can get a better paid job and give more to the family.”



Nurse Pasipanodya is one of millions of Zimbabweans who have left their home due to economic chaos and the repressive policies of the government of the ZANU-PF Party and the presidential rule of Robert Mugabe. In 20 years, Zimbabwe's agricultural production has plummeted 60 per cent so that there are now grave food shortages for its own people. HIV/AIDS infects up to 20 per cent of the population. One in four children is orphaned as a result of parents dying from AIDS.

Life expectancy is now one of the lowest on earth, falling in the last 10 years by 16 years to 47.5 years, though men and women are expected to live healthily only until their mid-30s.

Nurse and her husband David came to Australia as refugees, receiving a humanitarian visa in 2005. As a mature migrant, Nurse understands what life can be like on both sides of the fence. She is a mother of five who personifies the resilience of women.

In Australia she has been a key organiser for social groups, including a choir, for the expatriate Zimbabwean community. She was a founding member of the local Zimbabwean Catholic Community and the Zimbabwean Catholic Women's League and a youth group.

She also started a charity to assist HIV/AIDS sufferers in Zimbabwe.

“Sometimes you have sadness for the people you miss, your old friends. You have to rationalise it and tell yourself what you are going through is less than you have done before,” Nurse says.

“Where I came from is what made me what I am. Growing up in a country where there was racial discrimination because I am black has made me grow a thick skin. I never lost sight of the fact that I was black but I wanted to be respected as a human being.”

As wife and mother Nurse is also the heart of her family. When they came to Australia David, a school principal and businessman, was unable to find any equivalent work. “His first job was in a factory and our children were very upset for their father,” Nurse says. “To start over in a new country is a big challenge but I would quietly remind him of an old African saying: ‘Even the son of chief is a servant somewhere’.”

The wisdom of deep faith is another attribute Nurse imparts: “God is such a power in our life. People have to learn to stop and listen. Situations and problems are so overwhelming if you don’t listen to the greater power of God. But if you take the time to listen, to pray, you will remember the places you have been before and you will find within you the power to endure and overcome.”

Catholic Mission’s National Director, Martin Teulan, paid tribute to Nurse’s contribution to Australia: “Nurse doesn’t stand out from the crowd; she doesn’t impose herself on anyone. She just does what women do best. She uses her faith as strength to face enormous hardship and gets on with it,” said Mr Teulan “She gives a lot of herself, quietly and humbly. She reminds us that Jesus praised the widow who gave all she had humbly and unseen. (Mark 12:41-44). For International Women’s Day, it is women like Nurse we need to celebrate.”

In 160 countries around the world Catholic Mission funds projects specifically to enable and empower women to take charge of their own lives. In Zimbabwe in 2010 Catholic Mission directly helped 10,286 AIDS orphans and vulnerable children, including resourcing the education of girls who would otherwise be unable to attend school.

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