



Share Lent -- An invitation to be at the heart of change

The theme this year for the Share Lent Campaign is *Women at the Heart of Change*. Poverty and underdevelopment affect a disproportionate share of women because of poor education, lack of nutrition, precarious and low-paying employment, and discrimination. Yet women are often major makers of change in their homes and communities. United Nations statistics show that maintaining families and caring for family members lies primarily on the shoulders of the world's women, and on average most of the responsibilities for the home are borne by women (*The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics*). In addition to their key roles in sustaining the present generation and forming the next, women have a special role in reconciling, rehabilitating and rebuilding, bringing “*order out of chaos, community out of division, and peace out of conflict*,” by sharing “*their special gifts in educating people to be more receptive and sensitive to the needs of others*” (Holy See's Apostolic Nuncio to the United Nations, Archbishop Bernardito Auza, Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace, and Security, 25 October 2015).

In 2014, *Caritas Internationalis* recognized the central role women have in community, social and international development by partnering with *Voices of Faith* in presenting an annual award, “Women, Sowers of Development”. The award has to date brought international attention to the crucial roles of women in growing food and in working with refugee families – the examples are from Nicaragua and Syria. Over the past decade especially, the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace / Caritas Canada has focused on the rights and dignity of women, and their key role in the life of their communities and in promoting the common good. Development and Peace works with its partners to provide opportunities for women, including micro-financing and technical training, in countries where their rights are not recognized, their skills not appreciated, or their participation limited.

Mary, the Mother of Our Lord, is for all Christians a woman at the heart of change. In her act of faith, giving flesh to the Word of God, she demonstrates how the Kingdom of God shows mercy, lifts up the lowly, and fills the hungry with good things. “*In her we see that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong who need not treat others poorly in order to feel important themselves. Contemplating Mary, we realize that she who praised God for ‘bringing down the mighty from their thrones’ and ‘sending the rich away empty’ (Luke 1.52-53) is also the one who brings a homely warmth to our pursuit of justice.... She constantly contemplates the mystery of God in our world, in human history and in our daily lives. She is the woman of prayer and work in Nazareth, and she is also Our Lady of Help, who sets out from her town ‘with haste’ (Luke 1.39) to be of service to others*” (Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 288).

This Lent, let us accept the invitation of Development and Peace / Caritas Canada to look at what it means for each of us and our community of faith to be at the heart of change.

(Most Rev.) Douglas Crosby, OMI
Bishop of Hamilton and
President of the Canadian Conference
of Catholic Bishops