

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

Journée mondiale de prière
St. Martin's Anglican Church
March 6, 2009

*Sœur Rachelle Carmel Leblanc, Fille de la Sagesse, ancienne missionnaire en Papua New Guinea, a été invitée à prendre la parole à l'occasion de la Journée Mondiale de Prière, organisée par l'église anglicane St. Martin d'Ottawa. Ayant été 39 ans missionnaire en PNG et ayant œuvré particulièrement auprès des femmes de ce pays, Sœur Rachelle dit avoir été très touchée en apprenant que cette journée de prière avait été préparée en 2009, par les femmes de Papua New Guinea. Pour son entretien, elle a choisi le **BILUM**, (sac tissé avec l'écorce des arbres ou un autre matériel tel la laine, par exemple) **comme symbole représentatif de la femme en PNG.***

Petit bilum, grand bilum, bilum arborant le drapeau de la Papouasie, bilums colorés arborant la Croix ... autant de symboles qui évoquent l'évolution de la femme papoue. Grâce à la présence et à l'aide de missionnaires, comme Sœur Rachelle, les jeunes filles, entraînés très jeunes à transporter dans leur petit bilum, bois et aliments pour la famille, apprirent aussi l'importance de l'éducation et de l'hygiène. Elles agrandirent leur bilum : leur contribution, en transmettant des valeurs qui devaient améliorer la qualité de vie dans leurs villages.

En 1975, la Papouasie devient indépendante. Les femmes alors devinrent davantage conscientes de l'importance de leur rôle en solidarité avec les hommes, leurs maris et frères. C'est alors que Rachelle s'est engagée à développer des liens avec les organismes gouvernementaux ainsi qu'avec les différentes dénominations chrétiennes pour coordonner les activités des groupes de femmes jusque dans les villages les plus éloignés. Le souci de Rachelle ? Que tous les groupes de femmes soient rejoints dans leur réalité très quotidienne. Ceci a exigé d'elle de multiples et longs périples, à pied, en canot ou «dinghy» ou encore avec le petit avion de la mission. La formation des leaders féminines prit alors un grand essor.

Plusieurs problèmes existent toujours en PNG ...avoue Rachelle, comme la violence faite aux femmes, le sida etc... Cependant, en contemplant les bilums multicolores cela lui rappelle, le chemin parcouru par ces femmes courageuses et remplies de foi et leur grand désir de rendre la vie meilleure autour d'elles. Le bilum qui arbore la Croix, me rappelle, dit-elle, l'amour véritable qui les unit.



En juin prochain, Rachelle aura la joie de participer aux fêtes qui vont marquer le 50^e anniversaire de l'arrivée des premiers missionnaires catholiques dans la «Western Province» de PNG. Elle vibre déjà de la joie des retrouvailles !

Voici le texte de la conférence de S. Rachelle Carmel en langue anglaise :

My dear friends,

I am grateful to be here to share with you all, in this worship service of the World Day of Prayer, 2009.

I am a Daughter of Wisdom, catholic religious Sister residing on Montreal Road, Vanier, Ottawa. I had great joy in learning that the prayer program for this special day had been prepared by the women of Papua New Guinea. Yes, for 39 years, I had the privilege of doing different missionary works among them, of sharing the joys and sorrows of their daily lives.

IN CHRIST, THERE ARE MANY MEMBERS, YET ONE BODY. The Papua New Guinea women have received with an open heart, the Good News. Today I pray in solidarity with all the women of the Christian churches, of that beautiful country.

The symbol of the **BILUM**, (string bag weaved with the bark of trees, or other material such as wool), truly represents the Papua New Guinea women of the many tribes of the 19 provinces of the country. In my sharing this afternoon, you will meet the women of the Western Province, the largest province of PNG, but also a region which has few roads because of the many swamps that cover it.

SMALL BILUM, BIGGER BILUM ... symbols for the PNG women

In 1964, the year that I arrived in the country, few schools existed in this province. With a few companions, we started schools in remote villages and for 10 years, I taught and encouraged the parents to send their daughters as well as their sons to school. Still very young, the girl went to the garden with her mother, to fetch food for the family. In her small bilum she carried her share of vegetables to the house. As she became older her bilum became bigger to carry also some firewood, to go and make sago with the other village women.

Many teen-age girls could not attend High School. Special classes (C'E', community education) were started so that girls could keep on improving their English and Maths a few hours each day, while helping also their mother. They learned sewing, cooking traditional food and handicraft.

You have read in different documents from PNG that 60% of the women are still illiterate, today. But many who have been to school, and received an education, have become very good teachers in mission and government schools. Young women have also studied to become well-trained health workers, who are now reaching out, with a compassionate heart, to their sisters at the time of the birth of a baby, They teach these mothers how to improve the hygiene of their homes, and feed nutritious food to the family. (a look to the bilum that carries a baby !)

BILUM and the PNG FLAG

In 1975, PNG. became independent. The women wanted to work alongside the men, to build a strong nation. But they needed skills, to gain confidence in their ability to participate equally with their husbands, their brothers. At that time I worked closely with government agencies, and

with other Christian churches, to co-ordinate the activities of women groups, not only in the big centres but also in remote villages. We wanted to reach the women at the grass roots. This involved traveling long hours, either by foot, by canoe or dinghy or by small mission plane.

Workshops were organized to train women leaders in different skills, sewing, cooking, how to lead meetings in the village, the qualities needed to become good leaders in their own community. They in turn trained other women.

COLOURED BILUMS

Many problems still exist, in P.N.G., violence against women, aids, etc. But looking at these BILUMS, remind me of the long journey already traveled by the women of the Western Province during the last 50 years. I am also reminded of their desire to keep on to better their lives, to keep on with courage and faith. The BILUM on the cross, reminds me of the true love that binds them together.

In June, I will have the great joy of returning to P.N.G., to attend special celebrations commemorating the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the first missionaries of my church, in the Western Province. After an absence of more than 6 years it will certainly be a joyful reunion. The women are very happy to learn about the gathering today in this church in Canada, and the prayers made for and with them.

I would like to end by saying in the motuan language, the first part of the Lord's Prayer, the prayer that unites all Christians, in all countries of the world. We also pray for all the Canadian women.

AIEMAI T AMANA, 01 NOHO GUBA
DEKENAI, OIEMU LAD ANA TAUDIA IDIA
HANAMOA OIEMU BASILIA IA MAI
01 URA BAMONATAUDIA IDIA KARAIA
TANOBADA DEKENAI GUBA DEKENAI
BAMONA.

*Rachelle Carmel Leblanc, Fille de la Sagesse
2009*