

## GBGM Women's Division: Bible Women Program Expands to Angola



With a national election coming up in 2006, church women in Angola are helping their sisters—70 per cent of whom are illiterate—understand the issues and prepare themselves to vote in a country long at war.

Their work will be expanded with support from the United Methodist Women's Division, working with Church World Service (CWS), the ecumenical relief and rehabilitation. A division grant of \$30,000 in June is being matched by a CWS donor.

The joint initiative will bring to the African continent the Division's successful Bible Women program, which has spread across Asia and the Pacific and has literacy as a major component.



*The women are from the Women's Division, Church World Service, Africa Office and Angola National Council of Churches. Far left is Deolinda Teca, far right is Josefina Sandemba.*

*Image by: Courtesy of Kevin Velez  
Source: Women's Division*

One outcome could be an increase in the number of United Methodist Churches in Angola because the Bible Women approach develops leadership and organizational skills. Its pro-literacy method teaches women to read through symbols and pictures, and it offers instruction about issues ranging from HIV/AIDS to microcredit, domestic abuse, hygiene, and citizenship. The women at the grassroots choose the issues they will study. Bible Women have touched the lives of thousands of women in Asia and the Pacific.

The Division's grant will assist Church World Service and Angola Council of Church's Women's Desk reach their goal of providing literacy to 10,000 Angolan women over a three year period.

Deolinda Dorcas Teca is the director of justice, evangelism, reconciliation and cooperation for the Angolan Council of Churches and will help to oversee the use of the grant. She says that while teaching reading, Bible Women will also teach women about violence, human rights, peace building, and voter participation.

"From 1975, the country was involved in war for almost 27 years," according to Ms. Teca. "People were displaced. Many died. We feel that as the council of churches we need to strengthen our community in peace building and helping them to re-build, because it was what Jesus did."

With a free election being planned for next year and peace on the horizon, refugees are returning from neighboring countries to rebuild their lives. Those who stayed to confront the domestic turmoil look forward to new beginnings. The challenge now, says Ms. Teca, is to teach people how to live together again peacefully. "For us, it involves

education on the human side.”

Josefina Sandemba, director of the department of women for the Angolan Council of Christian Churches, notes that the Bible Women program of the Women’s Division appealed to them because the literacy techniques related to issues they were facing on a daily basis.

“We see domestic violence everywhere, in many, many communities,” according to the ecumenical executive. “If we show them a picture of it, ask them how they feel in that situation, and what we can do to overcome the situation, everyone can plan what we can do about it. Everyone is responsible.”

Partly because of the rate of illiteracy and other cultural factors, women in Angola are left behind. “This makes them dependent,” she says. “When the community talks about issues related to women, the women aren’t represented in the decision making.”

She used a lack of water as an example. Women walk miles each day to collect it, then to cook and care for their families; yet when the community talks about water, the women do not participate in the meetings. Likewise, when there are events educating people about peace, women are not present even though the violence directly affects them. Getting women into the dialogues is essential, according to Ms. Sandemba, adding:

“It’s important for us to empower women and make them confident in the participation of reconstruction. This is one of the objectives of the program of literacy for social change.”



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