

Unleashing the Potential of Women in Christ By Phyllis Anderson

Amazing things happen when women and faith and philanthropy come together as they do in the *WomenGive inFaith* campaign. This is because Christ is at the very heart of our shared work in this campaign to make a difference.

Women In Christ

God took on human flesh in Christ Jesus. His union went so deep that he even died our death. He became one with us so that we might participate in his life and be one with God. That is the heart of the Gospel. This union with God in Christ comes as a gift. It comes to men and women alike, but for now let's focus on women, women in Christ.

This gift is ours by grace. We are incorporated into Christ as we are -- as women, as human, created in God's image, both flawed and full of potential. All the wrong in us is forgiven. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

This union with Christ is real and it has consequences. In Christ you are claimed and cleansed. But not only that. You are also changed. Day by day you are being changed so that you become more and more like Christ – in what you hope for, in how you live your life, and in what you are able to do in the world.

Hoping with Christ

What do you hope for our world? Maybe it is something as basic as a healthy, loving start in life for your child, your grandchild – for every child. Maybe it is to put an end to cancer, or at least to ease the suffering this and so many other diseases bring. Maybe your passion is to end hunger once and for all or turn global warming around before it's too late. Do you wish you could smash all the barriers that hold people back and leave people out? Do you pray week in and week out for peace among people and nations locked in conflict?

These are not idle wishes or impossible dreams. Your deepest longings for yourself and your world are reflections of the very heart of Christ. They are concrete expressions of the new realm Jesus came to bring. Jesus showed us the life God intends for us all when he blessed the children, when he fed the multitudes, when he healed the sick and cast out demons, when he broke boundaries, when he brought the outsider in, when he forgave sins, when he offered peace beyond all understanding.

You share God's dream of a renewed humanity revealed in Jesus the Christ. This should not come as a surprise. As a woman of faith, you have been joined with Christ. You have been baptized into Christ. You have died with him in baptism and you will be raised with him to new life. You have been incorporated into Christ's body the Church. His body and blood nourish your whole being every time you receive communion. Your ongoing participation in the life of Christ shapes how you see the world. It awakens your passion for justice and kindles your love for people in any kind of need. It expands your vision of what is possible, so that your hopes and dreams are aligned more and more with the Kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed.

Living like Christ

If we are in Christ, then Jesus' life poured out for the world becomes the pattern for our lives. The cross on which he died is the ultimate symbol of God's love that knows no bounds. The English theologian W.H. Vanstone penned these words:

*Love that gives gives evermore,
Gives with zeal, with eager hands,
Spare not, keeps not, all outpours,
Ventures all, its all expends.**

Can we really love like this? We fall short – all of us, every day. While we are “in Christ”, we are not Christ. We are fallible human beings. We seek forgiveness all our lives, even as we grow more and more in his likeness.

Can this model of selfless, limitless loving be abused? Yes. If you don't know who you are, you can get lost in the loving. And women have more often suffered in unequal relationships where they are expected to do all the giving.

But daring to love like Christ is worth the risk. We experience the deep joy of being one with Christ when we love fiercely, when we give generously, when we commit all that we are and have for something larger than ourselves. What calls you? It could be a child with disabilities that demands your all. It could be a career that offers the chance to make a real difference in society. It could be an organization that serves people in great need that you could advance with a gift. It could be the church that you love that needs your leadership. When you say yes, you are following the pattern of Jesus.

Empowered by Christ

Because we are in Christ, we also participate in Christ's power. As women we don't talk enough about that. The one who shows us the way of self-giving love also gives us the power it takes to actually do it. Power is the capacity to make a difference, to have influence, to get something done. That might mean the power to make the lame to walk or the blind to see. It might also mean the courage to challenge systems that hurt people. Power comes in many forms: talent, love, wisdom, wealth, time, discernment, self-discipline, energy, connections, patience, fortitude. The Spirit gives each of us the powers we need, whatever it takes, to advance Christ's realm, God's dream for the world and yours.

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new!” (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). This great passage from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians was the theme of my daughter's confirmation class back in the early eighties. It should have been empowering for her. She should have heard: “Joy Anderson, child of God, you are reborn in the image of Christ and you share in his vision and his life and his power.”

But the translation we used then was different. It began, “If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature.” Her Confirmation text book was called *New Man in Christ*. She refused to be a man – old or new. And she hated that book and the teacher who didn't understand why for ninety minutes every Thursday night for that whole eighth grade year. We know better now. We know that women are fully included in all the promises of God. We are learning to speak the faith in ways that more accurately reflect God's expansive vision. And Joy is a powerful woman now,

whose faith propels her to expend herself and her financial resources to create a more just economy. Audacious. Generous. Faithful.

Women in Christ are partners in remaking the world as they share in God's vision, participate in Christ's pattern of self-giving love, and boldly use of the powers the Spirit lavishes on them. The *WomenGive inFaith* campaign inspires them to imagine what they might yet do and shows them real ways to put their dreams for the world into action.