

History of WICC

1800s:

Presbyterian women in the U.S. started a Day of Prayer for Home Missions in 1887.

Baptist women in the U.S. started a Day of Prayer for Foreign Missions in 1889.

The Anglican Women's Auxiliary of Canada began a day of "corporate intercessions for mission" in 1895.

1910s:

The Dominion Board of the Women's Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church (Canada) called a meeting for "united prayer for missions" in 1916.

On October 19, 1918, Bessie McMurchy invited representatives of five Women's Missionary Boards - Anglican, Baptist, Congregational, Methodist, and Presbyterian - to meet together to "promote the spread Christ's kingdom by united prayer, united action, and a stronger voice in national questions." This letter led to the formation of the group which later became the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada.

Discussions were interrupted by an influenza epidemic, but continued with a planning meeting on Feb. 15, 1919, resulting in the approval and drafting of a brief constitution. Two members were appointed from each cooperating board to the "Interim Committee on Federation of the Women's Missionary Society Boards of Canada".

On May 16, 1919, this committee hosted the first of what would become many mass meetings supporting the distribution of Christian literature.

1920s:

The first national inter-denominational women's day of prayer was held on January 9, 1920, in Lindsay, Ontario. A suggested worship outline was prepared by a small committee and printed in the Women's Missionary Society (WMS) magazine and also distributed by each Board.

Letters appreciative of the day of prayer were first reported in the WMS magazine. The first offering was enough to provide for \$100 to Christian literature, \$150 to the China Famine Fund, and \$141.98 for expenses!

In the U.S., the first interdenominational day of prayer was held on February 20, 1920.

On Friday, March 3, 1922, millions of churchwomen in Canada and the United States celebrated a common Day of Prayer. The Canadian committee continued to prepare its own service and the U.S. used the same theme as the Canadians and held the service on the same day.

The Inter-Board Committee of Missionary Societies in Canada was formed in 1925 to allow for expansion of membership beyond the founding groups; the Church of Christ joined the committee.

The women of the U.S. and Canada distributed a Day of Prayer service to many countries and partners in mission in 1926.

The World Day of Prayer for Missions was instituted in 1927.

1930s:

Helen Kim of Korea was the first woman outside of North America to write the worship service for the Women's World Day of Prayer (1930).

The Canadian committee, through the leadership of Kathleen MacArthur, prepared the World Day of Prayer service in 1931.

In 1933, worship services were prepared for girls and they held special meetings. Radio was in its infancy in the '30s. Miss McMurchy delivered a dominion-wide broadcast preparatory to the Women's World Day of Prayer. This was the first of similar CBC presentations during the following 20 years.

During this second decade, the Society of Friends, the Evangelical Lutherans, and the Salvation Army joined the committee.

1940s:

The Canadian committee decided to broaden its scope by accepting representatives from all the women members of the church, not just the Women's Missionary Societies, in 1942.

In 1945, the constitution was changed to expand beyond Missionary Societies and the name was then changed to the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada.

1950s:

A small office was opened in Toronto and distribution of the WDP services, pamphlets and supplies became the responsibility of the national office.

WICC became affiliated with the Canadian Council of Churches.

A Canadian, Ernestine Whiteside, prepared the 1952 WDP service.

The Council prepared and sent out its first Braille transcript of the Canadian service in 1957.

The emphasis changed from large gatherings to local ones. Speakers from around the world addressed the Council. Recognizing that youth are fascinated by other cultures, children's services were added to those already prepared.

In 1958, \$40,400 was allocated to 77 causes in many countries around the world.

1960s:

The African Methodist Episcopal, Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches sent representatives to Council meetings, bringing the denominational membership up to eleven.

WICC delegates attended seminars on Human Rights, and the Changing Status of Women in the world and in the church at the United Nations Church Centre.

Seminars sponsored by the National Council involving representatives of local Councils and committees from 10 provinces encouraged interdenominational effort across Canada.

In 1968, the first official meeting of the International World Day of Prayer Committee was held in Sweden. Laura Burnett, a Presbyterian from Canada, represented women of North America on the international committee. The international office was established in New York.

1970s:

The Fellowship of the Least Coin, an international prayer movement for peace and reconciliation, was launched in Canada. The program originated in Asia in 1956.

“Women’s” was deleted from the title and it became the World Day of Prayer.

The logo, “the hand that cherishes the flame of the Spirit is one with the hand that releases it” was designed to represent the work of WICC.

WICC offices, which had been housed with the Canadian Council of Churches, moved to the Centre for Christian Studies at 77 Charles St. W. in Toronto.

WICC members participated in conferences in Germany, Thailand, and Mexico, and the president, Ada Moore, attended the World Council of Churches meeting in Nairobi, Kenya.

In 1976, the Mennonites joined the Council.

The first National Gathering was held in Bolton, Ontario, in 1978 on the theme “Women Today Tomorrow.”

1980s:

WICC set up task groups to study human rights and seek ways to respond to justice issues. The Maritimes Human Rights task group produced the educational resource “Hands to End Violence Against Women”. The Western Human Rights task group addressed the needs of older farm women and produced a handbook and video, “Sowing Circles of Hope”.

A National Gathering was held in Thunder Bay in 1982, called “The Female Connection”; and in Winnipeg in 1986, called “Moving Mountains”.

Alice Jean Finlay became the first Canadian to be elected Chair of the WDP International Committee in 1986.

1988 marked the beginning of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, initiated by the World Council of Churches. WICC participated in the Canadian Decade Coordinating Group and housed it up to 1996.

The Ecumenical Taskforce on the Feminine Face of Poverty (FFP) was also housed with WICC. It conducted workshops across Canada and produced the video “A Fine Line”, addressing the feminization of poverty.

A National Gathering was held in Ottawa in 1989 and called “Women's Spirituality: Empowerment and Promise”.

1990s:

In 1993 the FFP organized a national gathering in Saskatchewan called "Women ON the Line, Women BELOW the Line". It was a gathering of women from diverse contexts who wanted to give voice to their experience of poverty and to their ideas for solutions. The FFP kit "Women Liberating Economics" was produced in 1994 as a tool to help churches address poverty.

The 16th annual meeting of the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin was held in Surrey BC in 1995 and hosted by WICC.

As part of the Decade Coordinating Committee, WICC participated in the 1998 Decade gathering "Daring Hope" in Canada; and in the International Decade Festival in Zimbabwe.

In 1999, WICC welcomed the work of the Ecumenical Decade into its own program and vision. Maintaining the networking and the newsletter were two of the commitments made.

2000s:

Making Waves, WICCs magazine, grew out of the Decade newsletter Groundswell and was launched in fall 2000. The first issue, "Exploring racial diversity and difference" signaled a new commitment by the organization to address racial justice.

WICC participated in the Canadian Women's March Coalition, a coalition of 25 national women's organizations that coordinated participation in the World March of Women, March - October 2000. Many women of faith organized local activities and joined the rally on Parliament Hill on October 15, 2000 demanding an end to the poverty and violence experienced by women.

The World Conference Against Racism in South Africa was attended by WICC members in September 2001. WICC was a founding member of the Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network that grew out of that conference and the reporting back by Canadians attending it.

"Remembering and ReVisioning Faith", the first Women Doing Theology in Canada gathering was held in 2002 in Winnipeg.

In September 2003, Sylvia Lisk Vanhaverbeke became the second Canadian to be elected as Chairperson of the World Day of Prayer International Committee.

WICC undertook a complete revision of "Hands to End Violence Against Women" and released "Healing Waters: Churches Working on Violence Against Women" in early 2004.

The Sisters in Spirit campaign was launched in March 2004 and the Amnesty International releases its Stolen Sisters report in October 2004. WICC joins the campaigns to raise awareness of and end the violence experienced by Indigenous women in Canada.

"Creating justice, Recognizing differences / Créons la justice, Reconnaissons les différences", the second gathering of Women Doing Theology was held in Montreal in June 2005. The largely Quebec planning team organized a bilingual conference that celebrated and was challenged by differences.

In November 2006, WICC hosted a gathering of faith-based groups working to end human trafficking.

In January 2007, WICC announced its new signature line: "Rooted in Faith, Called to Action".

WICC hosted the 11th Quadrennial meeting of the World Day of Prayer International Committee from May 30 - June 5, 2007 at King City, just north of Toronto.

In October 2008, WICC hosted the 28th annual meeting of the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin.

In 2008-2009, WICC celebrated its 90th anniversary and created a celebration DVD and commemorative pin.

In June 2009, WICC discontinued *WICC News* and *Making Waves* and launched the first issue of its new publication *Riding the Waves*. The newsmagazine continues providing engaging information about social justice issues such as human sex trafficking and gender-based violence, as well as Fellowship of the Least Coin prayer concerns.

2010s

In the 2010s, WICC developed its social media presence (especially on Facebook).

In 2013, WICC hosted a national women's gathering on human trafficking: "Caught in Traffick" in Winnipeg.

There were around 1,250 World Day of Prayer services held across Canada in 2017. In addition to the power of prayer, offerings enable WICC to support local and international grassroots projects. From the 2016 offerings, WICC was able to provide \$75,000 of grant funding.

In 2017, WICC piloted a new discussion-based model designed to engage younger generations interested in social justice issues.

WICC is updating its Ending Violence against Women resource in an accessible digital format. This will be available in 2017-2018.

In 2018, WICC is celebrating its 100th anniversary through events and a new website.