**2015 WORLD DAY OF PRAYER**

**March 6, 2015 - BAHAMAS**

**Jesus Said to Them: Do You Know What I Have Done to You?**

*Slide Text*

1. The Bahamas, an archipelago in the Caribbean

The official name of our country is **‘The Bahamas’.** The Bahamas is an expanse of water with many scattered islands, hence the term, ‘archipelago’.  It covers approximately 100,000 square miles of water in the Atlantic Ocean.

1. The Map

The most northern island, Bimini, is approximately 52 miles off the coast of Florida, USA.  From our most southern island, Inagua, one can see the glare of the lights of Cuba and of Haiti.

1. Andros Island

The largest island, Andros, is one 104 miles long and forty miles wide, at the widest point. Andros has the world's largest collection of [blue holes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_hole), and the world's third longest Barrier Reef.

1. Tropical weather

Being in the tropics, the temperature in The Bahamas is usually warm for most of the year. With the hottest months being June through October, they are highly subject to hurricanes.

1. National Symbols

The National symbols were established at Independence in 1973. The National Bird is the Flamingo. The adult flamingo is usually about four feet tall. Inagua is the home to over 80,000 flamingos over 140 species of native and migratory birds.  The National Flower is the Yellow Elder.   It grows naturally on every island. The National Fish is the Blue Marlin. The National Tree is the Lignum Vitae - the tree of life. This tree is used for medicinal purposes and its bark is used in boat building and for making children’s toys.

1. The Bahamas flag

The colors in our flag are gold – for the sun; aquamarine - for the sea; and black – for the strength of the people. In 1973, a new coat of arms was introduced which included all the new national symbols and the new motto of The Bahamas: ‘Forward, Upward, Onward, Together’.

1. Population

The latest census listed a total population of 353,658, of which 248,948 live on the island of New Providence. The island of Grand Bahama, the second largest city, has a population of 51,756 and only six other islands have a population of 3,000 persons and over. The descendants of the African slaves constitute about 85% of the present day population, whites 12% and other nationalities 3%.

1. The Arrival of Christopher Columbus

The first Europeans arrived in 1492, with the Christopher Columbus expedition from Spain seeking the route to India. Before his arrival, the islands were inhabited by some 45,000 Lucayan and Arawak Indians. In a few short years, many died from diseases brought over by the Europeans. Between 1509 and 1511, the entire surviving population was enslaved and shipped to Hispaniola to work in the gold mines. The archipelago remained virtually uninhabited until the coming of the Eleutheran Adventurers around 1647.

1. The colonization

The earliest permanent European settlement occurred in 1647, when Puritans from the English colony of Bermuda founded Eleuthera. In 1666, other English settlers established a colony on New Providence and founded Charlestown, known today as Nassau. Throughout the seventeenth century, the islands served as a base for pirates, where they attacked French and Spanish ships.

1. Struggle against slavery

The 18th century slave trade brought many Africans to the Bahamas. Slavery was abolished in 1807 by the British Parliament. However, slavery within British territories was permissible once a license was obtained and a bond was signed. The slaves were freed by the Emancipation Act of 1834 which set up an Apprenticeship System. In 1838 the Emancipation Act ended the compulsory apprenticeship period and gave the ex-slaves complete freedom. Slave rebellions occurred in Abaco in 1789, between 1828-1834 in Exuma, Cat Island in 1831, and Watlings Island in 1832.

1. The Independence

Bahamians achieved self-government in 1964 and full independence within the Commonwealth of British Nations on July 10, 1973. The country’s first prime minister was the late Sir Lynden O. Pindling, leader of the Progressive Liberal Party. Pindling ruled for over 25 years. The Commonwealth of The Bahamas is a constitutional monarchy and Queen Elisabeth II is the head of State.

1. Equal voting rights

Until 1953, the Parliament was controlled by a white minority through limiting voting rights to property ownership, plural voting and company voting. The first political national party – the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) obtained six seats out of 29 in 1954. Two years later, the Assembly approved an anti-discrimination law to promote ethnic equality, which gave to the Afro-Caribbean population access to rights that were denied before.

1. Women’s suffrage movement

The Women’s Suffrage Movement secured the vote for women in 1962. The first woman to register to vote was Mrs. Rubyann Cooper Darling. Dame Doris Johnson was the only woman candidate in the 1967 elections. She did not win her seat in Parliament, but was appointed to the Senate.  Janet Bostwick was the first woman elected to Parliament in 1982. Since that time, the country has had female Presidents of The Court of Appeal and Senate, Members of Parliament, a Deputy and a Governor General and even a Deputy Prime Minister from 2002 to 2007.

In 2012, the Women’s Suffrage Movement in the Bahamas celebrated its 50th anniversary. Marion Bethel, a daughter of one of the leaders of the movement, documented the effort of women to resist and redress racial discrimination, segregation and the social, political and economic inequities that permeated Bahamian society. For a short video clip on the Movement, see the following website: <http://www.womensuffragebahamas.com/>

Through the film, “Womanish Ways, Freedom, Human Rights & Democracy, The Women’s Suffrage Movement in The Bahamas, 1948-1962”**,** Marion Bethel “wishes to celebrate the leaders of the Suffrage Movement and the thousands of women who supported their vision and struggled for more than a decade for the right to vote for women. She intended to deepen the awareness of this under-documented part of Bahamian history and to demand its rightful place as a powerful and significant national narrative of this period.” On July 1st 2014, in Antigua and Barbuda, Marion Bethel received an award from the Caribbean Community Secretariat (CARICOM), the Eleventh Triennial Award for Women.

1. Education

All islands of the Bahamas have either public school from primary to secondary, however on some of the remote islands provisions are made for ‘all age’ schools. Students can remain in their individual islands through high school. Financial assistance is given to Family Island students who qualify for entrance into the College of The Bahamas in New Providence. Government and private scholarships are given to men and women to attend the College of the Bahamas, private high schools in the Bahamas, and universities and colleges in the Caribbean, United States, Canada, England and Europe, in order to advance in careers appropriate to the stated needs of the country. However, many of those students abroad, never come back to live in the Bahamas again.

1. Health

Primary health care is delivered through a network of 28 health centers, 33 main clinics in New Providence, and 35 satellite clinics dispersed across 30 inhabited Bahamian Family Islands. There are severe staffing limits for the Family Island clinics causing inpatient and emergency outpatient overcrowding and long waiting times. Coverage of pregnant women by the antenatal service is high, including HIV screening of antenatal women and treatment of those who are positive. Breast feeding rates are low: less than one-quarter of babies are solely breast fed at 4 weeks. Cancer of the breast and prostate are increasing. The government report on HIV/AIDS in 2014 identified an increase of newly reported HIV-AIDS cases among men. People aged 15-24 accounted for 17%, while people aged 25-44 comprised 50% of the cases. Among them, 24% are people from Haiti living in the Bahamas. However, women accounted for 51% of newly diagnosed HIV infections.

1. Economy

The Bahamas economy is driven by tourism and offshore banking. Half of all jobs are generated by mass tourism, including infrastructural development initiatives like airports, harbors, ports, hotels and roads. The Nassau Harbor accommodates the world’s largest passenger vessels. It is estimated that approximately 1.5 million stopover visitors and 3.5 million cruise visitors per annum come to the Bahamas.

1. Employment situation

Women have equal status under the law, but men tend to control the higher income and higher status positions in some areas of the private sector and the Legislature. Women can hold prominent positions in the work place as well as in the political arena in the main islands like New Providence, Grand Bahama, and Abaco. However, women with low levels of formal education, especially in the Family Islands, can be more vulnerable to poverty. The main paid job of Bahamian women is of a domestic nature, even in the tourism industry. Men dominate fishing and other maritime activities, building trades, and the transportation industry.

1. Violence against women and girls

Violence against women and sexual assault are on the increase, even though laws against Domestic Violence have been approved. Impunity, patriarchal culture, and backlogs in the judicial system are obstacles to the implementation. Women’s organization and church women are raising awareness and educating communities about the signs of domestic violence, teen dating violence, marital rape, children sexual abuse, and psychological abuse. The message of the Bahamas Crisis Center is: “The greatest gift you can give to your child is self-esteem”. (<http://www.bahamascrisiscentre.org/>)

1. Haitian Migrants

Haitian nationals, from the French/Creole speaking nation of Haiti on the Island of Hispaniola, make up most of the migrant population in the Bahamas. Living in extreme poverty in Haiti, they migrate to the Bahamas for jobs. Many of them migrate in overloaded sailboats, which sometimes capsize before reaching the island, killing many of their passengers

The increasing number of Haitian children migrating with their relatives to the Bahamas is felt in the communities. In Nassau, at the ‘Over the Hill’ neighborhood, volunteers dedicate their time to serve the Bahamian and Haitian children with meals and homework help at the Quackoo Street Children Club.

1. Children’s citizenship

We continue to work and to pray for equal rights for foreign women in the area of citizenship for both children and spouses. Women still do not have the same power to grant citizenship on their offspring as do Bahamian men. A woman can obtain citizenship if she is married to a Bahamian man; but it is very difficult for a woman to get the same treatment for a non-Bahamian husband, or to confer citizenship on a child born outside the Bahamas if she is unmarried.

1. Art and Culture

The spirit of the people of The Bahamas is celebrated in art and craft, music, dance, theatre, fashion, the native straw industry, cuisine, cinema, storytelling and the Festival Arts. People in costumes dance on the festive Junkanoo parade, which takes place traditionally in the early hours of Boxing Day (December 26) and New Year’s Day, winding up after sunrise. The movement is a slow, dancing march which Bahamians call ‘rushing’.

1. Food and culture

We are blessed with a myriad of seafood, fish, conch and lobster. From these delicacies we make Boiled or Stewed Fish, Conch Salad, Conch Fritter, Conch Chowder and Minced Lobster seasoned primarily with salt, pepper with lime or lemon juice. Many of our deserts and sweets are made from local fruits for example: guava (Duff), coconut and pineapple (Tarts). A refreshing local drink is coconut water, and Switcher, made from sour orange, limes or lemons.

1. Religion

Christianity is the dominant religion in the Bahamas. The establishment of Christianity in the Bahama Islands occurred in 1647 when the Eleutherian Adventurers seeking religious freedom landed at Eleuthera (from Greek word meaning freedom), where they founded a permanent settlement. It was led by Captain William Sayle, former Governor of Bermuda. In 1670, the Bahamas was granted to the Lord Proprietors of Carolina by the English Crown, who established the Anglican Cathedral, Christ Church.

1. World Day of Prayer Bahamas Committee

Sometime in 1950, many women were seen on the first Friday in March, all wearing white dresses, and heading for the only Presbyterian Church in Nassau. They were going to attend the World Day of Prayer Service, organized by the wife of the Presbyterian Minister. Most of the Presbyterian Ministers who served in The Bahamas were Scottish, so it is presumed that the program for that service came from Scotland.

In the early 1970’s, a committee was formed of women representing the major denominations in The Bahamas: Anglican, Baptist, Church of God, Methodist, Roman Catholic, Salvation Army, Presbyterian, and Greek Orthodox. In 1975, Mrs Judy Munroe, along with the Methodist Deaconess, Sister Olga Brookes-Smith, established a committee to also conduct the WDP service in Freeport, on Grand Bahama Island.

Mrs. Annette Poitier attended the WDPIC International Meetings in Cape Town, South Africa, in 1999, and at Swanick, England, in 2003, where she became a member of the WDPIC Executive Committee, and was elected as WDPIC Chairperson in 2007. In 2011, the WDP National Committee was formed with women from four islands, and from the major denominations: Anglican, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, the Church of God of Prophecy, and Community (non-denominational) churches.

World Day of Prayer is now celebrated in six islands including New Providence, Grand Bahama, Eleuthera, Andros, Exuma and Abaco and is expected to encompass all islands when the service is celebrated in 2015.

The actual committee is headed by a young Baptist woman, Miss Vernita Davis, with a Roman Catholic Nun, Sister Annie Thompson, O.S.B. as WDPIC Liaison. Mrs. Barbara Sawyer is Anglican, and serves as treasurer. Mrs. Annette Poitier serves as member ex-officio and advisor to the Committee. The four women live in New Providence. From the other Islands, we have Mrs. Annamae Dorsette, member of Church of God, and WDP Vice President, from Andros Island. Our youngest member is our secretary Miss Tiffany Smith, from Grand Bahama. Rev. Rubie Nottage, from New Providence is our theological consultant. When we need substitutes, we call upon Rev. Isolene Rolle, Baptist, and Mrs. June Ferguson, from Community church. The Writer Committee for the 2015 WDP Celebration gathered more than 20 women leaders.

1. Young women in WDP Bahamas activities

Young women were invited to join and engage in all activities of the WDP committee and share their leadership in the writing process of the worship resources and the promotion of WDP.

1. WDP Writer Country Preparatory Workshop highlights

During the Preparatory Workshop held in 2012, the participants developed the thematic framework and formed the working groups to further develop the worship service and resource material. Jesus washing the foot of his disciples (John 13:1-7) was interpreted for the Bahamian context where love is always needed.

1. Writer Committee for 2015 WDP Bahamas: Jesus said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you?”

1. WDP 2015 Artwork – Blessed

“Blessed” celebrates the Bahamas through our National Bird, the Flamingo. It also celebrates our blessings as we share with the world across the ocean. The flamingos bow at the feet of Christ for there is Forgiveness, Peace and Love in this act of Submission. Chantal E. Y. Bethel

1. Chantal E.Y. Bethel

Chantal Bethel works from a place of deep emotion to craft her paintings. Drawing upon the landscapes and folklore of her heritage, as well as from the stirrings within her soul, Chantal moves viewers through her signature application of color to find beauty and resilience, sometimes even in the darkest and most difficult of places.

Bethel believes that art is a powerful tool for healing and learning, her training includes “Art as a Healing Practice”.   In addition she believes art is a powerful force in culture and history. To that end, she co-founded the Grand Bahama Heritage Foundation, a non-profit organization with the mission to research and tell the story of Grand Bahama Island's heritage through meaningful art projects that celebrate past, present and future. She lives and works on the island of Grand Bahama, The Bahamas. Website: www.chantalbethel.com