



Ann-Marie Wilson

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Location: Britain



What I do: Working to end FGM and violence against women and girls, specifically across Africa and the diaspora where FGM is practised.

Dear Friends,

February started with the global anti FGM day on the 6th, and the Orchid Project team made our presence known both in the UK through a social media campaign and via team members in New York for the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

This is the first year since the pandemic that our team returned in person to New York, and Asenath, our CEO, spoke, while three of us from Orchid pitched to a key donor, known for many years. We were delighted to be offered a very generous donation, as they were so impressed with our work to end FGM. Interestingly, this time their donation is for anti-FGM work in Asia and the Middle East, where FGM is just as strong as pockets of Africa, yet we have not had the chance to resource our research and law reports there in our first decade. We have begun in Malaysia (see report here: fgmcri.org) and are working on Indonesia. Do look at the Orchid website or www.28TooMany.com to see our research updates.

The picture of me with a poster saying "Take your seat at the summit" summarises my 40 years of campaigning for the rights for women, standing on the shoulders of giants who have gone before, mentoring and coaching women to lead the next generation, taking their place at the table. CSW is about gender equality and women's empowerment, ensuring we do not suppress the views of people from other nations, who have different views.

Other work

Meanwhile, I visited Bishop Jonathan, Bishop of Kensington and Chelsea, and discussed church roles and what I sense God calling me to next. He was very encouraging of my calling and college training.

Also in February I continued to help run a women's bring and share lunch, for women who head up single parent households. It is a delightful opportunity to share conversations and help alleviate potential loneliness. I have also attended four evening cookery classes, where I saw first-hand how people live from a morning art class, where a sandwich lunch is provided, to an evening cookery course where people eat and take home food. Hearing people talk about their livelihood broke my heart, and made me understand the need for food banks, which many of our churches run. At one of these cookery classes I made Easter biscuits as a witness to those of other, or no, faith.

At the end of February I was pleased to speak at All Nations College to 200 students about the work I've been doing in anti-FGM, chaplaincy, and the college course I am undertaking. (The course has covered



My contribution for the CSW "Take a Seat at the Summit" campaign from the UN in New York.

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pastoral, inter-faith and biblical studies, alongside sacramental and preaching skills.)

Another initiative I have undertaken in Barnet is a Mix and Mingle evening with 40 women, where we share with different generations and backgrounds. It was a delightful evening learning about people who are my friends and neighbours, as this helps breakdown barriers between different cultures.

I recently attended a lecture at a Northwood synagogue, hosted by a Muslim councillor, with a Jewish woman Rabbi, a Catholic priest and a Sikh minister, all talking about how death affects faiths, and how mourning is undertaken differently in each faith. This helped me understand how I can support those I work with in my chaplaincy role at Noah's Ark children's hospice, where I come alongside the children in the hospice, their siblings and the parents of affected families.

As I approached Lent, I prepared by eating pancakes on Shrove Tuesday and had ashes painted on my forehead on Ash Wednesday. I also started my Lenten commitment this year to "de-clutter". Interestingly, last year I committed to "not watching television", which I have now kept up and am still not watching! So far I have cleared 29 areas of my home and office and those bags will go to local charities for them to sell for funding their charity work.

In preparation for Easter, I went to a Chrism Service at St Paul's Cathedral where I collected my holy oil for end of life ministry. Also over Lent, I attended communion weekly and read out loud for an hour, in a deserted, dark church, from an 1880 Bible that was too heavy to move! Readings are undertaken during Lent in the church 24/7 even if, at times, the church is empty. I also went to see the St John's Passion performed in my local Anglo-Catholic church.

I submitted my second college assignment – an extensive exegesis and a sermon – on the book of Esther. All too soon I was back at college, only seven weeks left before we have our final face to face pastoral assessment and graduation weekend combined. Please pray that this is successful. In preparation, I am attending a catholic life conference at a Church of England church in Dalston, and a two-day Holy Trinity Brompton conference on leadership.

I met up with the missions pastor from St Barnabas Church for tea, where I was given a mug of my 24 years of mission in photos – expect to see it if you come for a cuppa!

On another note, my health is vastly improved after a rocky six months. God is good and I seem to have got to a point where I do not need life-threatening neck/back surgery for now, so please pray as I process what to do about that in the next year.

I look forward to meeting the new Bishop of Edmonton at his consecration, and then see where I can clarify my place in the Church in the foreseeable future. Please pray for wisdom as I undertake this.

Finally, I attended two "safe churches" webinars following the 2023 Lambeth Conference where I gave my case study on safeguarding.

Blessings and prayers, Ann-Marie xx



Photos from top to bottom: Baking Easter cookies at a cookery class; with some of the students from my session at All Nations College; Lenten Bible reading overnight in a local church; quiet room for Lent prayers at St Barnabas with the pastoral team.



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