

**Celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Fellowship of the Least Coin
An Ecumenical Prayer Movement for Justice, Peace and Reconciliation**

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The vision and the idea of the Fellowship of the Least Coin Prayer Movement was conceived in the mind of a simple and humble woman from India named Shanti Solomon, who knew and was acquainted with grief and pain. Her name, “Shanti,” means “Peace,” and described her well.

It happened in September 1956. Shanti joined an International Pacific Mission team sponsored by the women of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, in an attempt to build bridges and heal wounds. The team was led by Dr. Margaret Shannon. The plan was to visit the war-torn areas of north east Asia with a message of peace and reconciliation.

Members of the team were

- Margaret Shannon, of the National Office of Presbyterian Women in US and a member of the Board of Directors of the Church Women United, USA
- Marian Wiltsie, Chair of the Committee on Women’s Work of the Board of National Missions
- Amy Carl, Vice-President of the National Council of Presbyterian Women’s Organisations
- Ellen Lang, an active member of the Presbytery at Haines in Alaska
- Shanti Solomon, Chair of the Women’s Work Committee of India Council, and
- Teruko Ohashi, a Japanese student in America, on her return home.

Their first stop was Tokyo. Although, the Second World War had ended a little over ten years ago, the team found that bitterness, hatred and resentment still thrived between individuals, communities and countries, as described by Shanti. It was even more devastating when Shanti Solomon was denied a visa to Korea, because India had supported the United Nations decision to divide the Korean Peninsula. Teruko Ohashi was also refused entry to Korea for being a Japanese.

Rayann Ma of Hong Kong and Carmen Armonio from the Philippines were recruited to fill in, while Shanti went to the Philippines.

The Birth of the FLC Prayer Movement

While in the Philippines, Shanti felt the resentment of many Filipinos against the Japanese, as she had felt the antagonism of Japanese against the Americans when traveling in Japan. Shanti recalled, “I kept thinking over this ‘hurt—revenge’ attitude during the three days that I was separated from the team, staying in the Philippines. So often we get into the same state when someone has hurt us. The only way out of this vicious circle is through forgiveness The forgiveness can bring out love in the other and develop into trust between two former enemies.”

She also reflected on the national and economic barriers that keep women apart. She realized that prayer surpasses national barriers, and if each woman set aside her least coin whenever she prayed for peace and reconciliation, even the poorest woman could participate on an equal

footing with a more affluent woman, who would also be setting aside the same least coin when she prayed.

She said, “Through the act of prayer we learn to get reconciled with those who hurt us most, and thus enjoy peace of mind. Forgiveness brings reconciliation which breeds love for our enemies and promotes peace. The setting aside of a least coin is intended to be a symbol of the giver’s willingness to forgive—a reminder that we must often take the first step if there is to be genuine reconciliation. The smallest coin collected as a fund becomes a message of love and peace to those who are helped.”

Then she added, “One more idea struck me, and this has given the Fellowship uniqueness. “I did not want the women to think of the coins they offered as a fund-raising effort. I therefore, decided that each woman should only offer the least coin of her currency, and there should be no competition about ‘who collected more’. The poor village woman and her urban sister would pray and offer equal amounts.”

Shanti shared these thoughts with the other members of the team on their return from Korea and they all decided, as a team, to start a movement for reconciliation and peace. That was how the Fellowship of the Least Coin Prayer was born.

In recalling the moment of birthing, Shanti wrote, “We pledged that each of us, when hurt by another person, instead of harbouring resentment, would kneel down and pray to God to give her strength to forgive that person. In other words, we would start a movement for reconciliation at the individual level since we felt so helpless at the national level.”

From the very time of birth and inception of the Fellowship of the Least Coin Prayer Movement, the foundation and the primary emphasis of the movement has been on “prayer” and “the least,” not on money. The primary purpose is not to raise money, but to unite Christian women of many lands in a mutual concern and discipline of giving and receiving, with the spirit of love and forgiveness through faithful intercessory prayer.

The Growth

The FLC movement spread quickly, first in the Philippines, in Japan, in other parts of Asia , and to other continents of the world. It has become a simple, yet a unique act of praying for peace, justice and reconciliation.

Margaret Shannon was particularly taken with the idea of setting aside a least coin as something unique. After attending the first dedication of least coins which took place at a gathering of Filipino women in 1957, Margaret wrote, “I want to share with you the glow of ‘belonging’ that swept over me as I sat there and watched those women . . . come forward with their ‘least coin.’ We of the West know nothing of the poverty of the East, and to have an opportunity to share one’s ‘least coin’ with all the other Christian women of the world is a rare and wonderful privilege.”

“Too often the least coins were taken up like a collection. It seems to result in emptying the purse rather than pouring out one’s heart for another in prayer. How much better it would have been if we remembered that both the prayer and the least coin were offered in sincerity and in secret.”

Margaret Shannon was a pioneer and founding member of the FLC Prayer Movement. Dorothy Wagner, named as “midwife” to the FLC, interpreted and nurtured the FLC in the United States and took responsibility for editing, printing and distributing “Circle of Prayer” in the early years. Both of them traveled extensively, linking with the Asian Church Women’s Conference (ACWC), in promoting the FLC Prayer Movement in the USA.

The East Asia Christian Conference (EACC), now the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) helped promote and took care of FLC fund from 1958 until 1970. In 1958, the First Assembly of the Asian Church Women’s Conference (ACWC) held in Hong Kong agreed to administer the Fellowship of the Least Coin. At the Second Assembly in Petburi, Thailand in 1962, ACWC voted to make the promotion of FLC their basic outreach program. In 1970, Mrs. Shanti Solomon, the founder, was named the Executive Secretary of the FLC and ACWC. She was followed by Mrs. Shirin Samuel of Pakistan (1987–1997).

The FLC Logo and the Circle of Prayer

The idea for the FLC logo—the praying hands forming a lotus flower—came from the late Mrs. Rayann Ma of Hong Kong. She was the first chairperson of the First Assembly of the Asian Church Women’s Conference in Hong Kong. The actual design was the gift of her brother-in-law, James Ma, a commercial artist.

In 1962, the Church Women of Hong Kong were asked to prepare a booklet of prayers as the “least coin” is set aside. Since then, the “Circle of Prayer” booklet has become an important part of the FLC. Twenty-four meditations and prayers are written by women around the world and published once every two years.

The International Committee for the Fellowship of the Least Coin (ICFLC)

Because the FLC Prayer Movement became truly world-wide and grants were made to programs and projects all over the world, the International Committee for the Fellowship of the Least Coin (ICFLC) was formed in 1979 to administer the promotion and the interpretation of the movement and the allocation of grants. It was agreed that the administration of ICFLC be based in Asia and be related to ACWC and that an Executive Secretary would work full time for ICFLC.

The International Committee comprises representatives of Worldwide Ecumenical Women’s Organizations and of regional ecumenical Conferences of Churches. The Committee meets once a year.

In the early years, the ACWC President acted as the Chairperson of the ICFLC. In 1995, Rev. Mary Cline Detrick, a representative from the Church Women United USA, was the first non-

Asian elected Chairperson of the ICFLC. Since then, the Chairpersons of the ICFLC have been elected from among the representatives of the different regional bodies.

The FLC Grants

Each year about 35–40 projects receive grants. Besides, each Regional Women's Desk of ecumenical conferences, the Women's Programme of the World Council of Churches and the World Day of Prayer International Committee are given block grants to enhance their work, to strengthen ecumenical solidarity and to promote the FLC Prayer Movement. Emergency grants for disaster relief and rehabilitation are also given.

Project grants are given as initial seed money for—

- emerging opportunities for awareness-raising and/or education on gender issues
- programs of literacy, health, violence against women and children, leadership development and other social issues recommended by recognized Christian groups
- women's programs that promote justice, peace and reconciliation, in families, communities and the environment
- enabling women to meet ecumenically in regional and worldwide gatherings and to participate in ecumenical regional and global movements

The first project grant of \$4,075.00 was made in 1959; it purchased an orphanage in Korea and funded education for the orphans.

- 1961, five years after the inception, FLC grants were allocated to 24 projects in five continents
- 1966, on the 10th Anniversary of the FLC, 25 projects in 7 continents were supported
- 1970, around 60 projects from eight continents received the grants

The Impact and the Effect of the FLC Prayer Movement

While preparing for the 50th Anniversary Jubilee Celebration of the FLC Prayer Movement, we are conscious of the need to keep questioning ourselves—How do we prepare a meaningful celebration? How do we measure the impact and the effect of the FLC Prayer Movement? How can we measure the power of prayer and the loving concern which have touched the lives of people?

In trying to find answers to these questions, we are reminded that the power of prayer and loving concern are beyond measure. It is not by counting how much money, how many least coins were collected or how many projects have been funded that we can measure the impact and the effect of the FLC Prayer Movement.

It is only through the testimonies of lives that have been touched and changed by faithful prayers and lovingly-offered least coins that the wonder of God's transforming and healing grace can be manifested and the impact of the FLC Prayer Movement can be made known.

Since its foundation the primary emphasis of the FLC Prayer Movement has been on prayer. The strength of this movement—and the amount of resources to support the work of healing and reconciliation—depend on the prayer life of individuals and communities.

The more wars, conflicts, political and social unrest, violence, economic crises and hardships we face in our world today, the more we should be prompted to pray and to set aside least coins for people who are destitute, hungry, homeless and/or wounded.

The Uniqueness of FLC Prayer Movement

The FLC Prayer Movement is simple, yet significant and unique.

It brings Christian women together in a fellowship of prayer without any discrimination based on race, nationality, culture or denomination. The Christian women of the world are in solidarity with each other through their common concern and love for humankind. Women throughout the world are bound together in both giving and receiving.

The offering is unique because all—whether rich or poor, educated or illiterate, urban or rural women—give only the smallest coin of their currency. All are within the same discipline and share the common concerns of women around the world.

The Fellowship binds us together in giving and receiving and teaches us to appreciate differences; to understand and forgive one another; to live and to work together inter-dependently as equal partners.

The Least Coin teaches us to be humble, to value the least and to trust that nothing is impossible for God who can do great things out of the least and the unexpected.

Our concern and yearning for peace in the wounded and broken world, which moves us to spontaneously pray and give, becomes a powerful healing source for our own pain as well as the pain of those whose lives have been touched by our prayers and gifts.

Questions and Challenges for a Meaningful Participation in the FLC Prayer Movement

- Do we really know and understand whom we pray for and what we pray for?
- Are our prayers spontaneously responsive to the cry and the needs of the destitute, the poor and the least?
- Are our hearts and lives touched/ moved by the people for whom we pray and the needs for which we set aside the least coin?
- How can we become bridge-builders and healers between the giver and the receiver?
- Are we committed to remain faithful in stewardship and accountability to the FLC Prayer Movement?

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