

Globalization: the word itself evokes a kaleidoscope of images.

There are many uses of the term, both positive and negative. On the positive side, globalization is a mechanism for strengthening the bonds of interconnectedness and interdependence between cultures in the human community.¹ From the western perspective, we may hope to spread the ideas of democracy, human rights, and freedom of the press.² From a religious perspective, we may want to spread hope, dispel superstition, improve quality of life, and dignify the position of women in societies where they are subordinated and ill-used.

As Friedman points out in his book, *The World is Flat*,³ the forces of globalization introduce a complex and challenging admixture of benefits and risks. The forces of globalization can be used to reduce poverty and suffering, or to dominate, exploit, and impoverish, as some transnational corporations are accused of doing. The challenge to Adventist women is to do “our best to encourage its favorable aspects and keep its negative consequences at bay.”⁴

In July, Alvin and I had the opportunity to spend 16 days in Kenya visiting orphanages, schools, and rural villages where the daily struggle for survival, when coupled with the rampant consequences of HIV/AIDS, constitutes a harsh reality. One cannot touch the lives of rural Kenyan women without quickly recognizing the disproportionate burden borne by the women and girls.

The conclusion is compelling. Without some minimum level of self-determination, the majority of rural women are doomed to lives that arguably can be characterized as worse than slavery. Many are doomed to early death. In the early days of the Adventist church, the leaders were engaged in the fight for the abolition of slavery. Should we do less in our time when confronted by the widespread subordination and exploitation of women?

Jesus led the way in the history of globalization. He told His followers to go and preach His good news to the entire world, thus introducing compassionate globalization to his followers two thousand years ago. While devoted Christian servants have attempted to spread the gospel throughout the centuries, in the second half of the 20th century factors have converged which have accelerated the process. Exciting advances in information and communications technologies—including the Internet—break down artificial barriers imposed by national boundaries, governments, and ideologies. Steadily falling prices make these advances available to more and more individuals. It is becoming virtually impossible for any entity to completely limit access to information worldwide.

The world seems to shrink in the face of these startling



Verla Michel Kwiram presenting mosquito nets to a widow in Nyalgunga, Kenya, July 2006.

innovations. It is now possible to “spread various objects and experiences to people at all corners of the earth.”⁵ As I sit at my computer, I correspond with ease with women in China, Africa, Europe, or South America with a few strokes on my keyboard. Likewise, the members of our church also are becoming rapidly interconnected. We no longer need to think of mission stories as accounts of far-off experiences. Experiences ten thousand miles away are accessible to us individually and in real time.

What does this mean for the Association of Adventist Women? I suggest that, when the experiences of Adventist women from around the world become known to us, when direct interaction is only a phone call away, we must accept responsibility by doing what we can to relieve suffering, reduce isolation, and enhance the status of women wherever they are. How can we come together as a church if we ignore the AIDS menace that is killing young mothers in much of the world? According to Stephen Lewis, UN AIDS Envoy to Africa, “Gender inequality is driving the [HIV/AIDS] pandemic, and we will never subdue the gruesome force of AIDS until the rights of women become paramount in the struggle.”⁶

When the church fails to act aggressively to oppose the forces that repress women, women must call for change. All women, wherever they are in the world, need to enjoy basic human rights, be treated as fully human, and be free of violence and abuse. Christ’s inclusiveness must be enjoyed by all, and we must be His agents if we are to call ourselves Christians.

In other words, all women, and Adventist women in particular, need to practice what Mary Robinson calls ethical globalization, by realizing that “common humanity doesn’t stop at national borders;” by “recognizing that all individuals are equal in dignity;” by embracing the

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New Director of Women's Resource Center

Heide Ford was selected as the new director of the Women's Resource Center at La Sierra University in May 2006, replacing Penny Shell, who has retired to the Pacific Northwest. Ms. Ford began her duties August 1.

Heide has a background in nursing and pastoral counseling. With Penny Estes Wheeler, she was co-founder of *Women of Spirit* and its editor from 1994 to 2003. She earned a bachelor's degree in nursing from Southern Adventist University and a master's degree in counseling from Andrews University.

Penny Shell, retiring WRC director, states, "It is very encouraging to see the Women's Resource Center pass into such capable hands. I know the La Sierra Campus and the friends and supporters of the Women's Resource Center will quickly learn to enjoy and admire Heide for the vision and strength and optimism that she brings to the center."

Among her dreams for the Women's Resource Center, says Ms. Ford, are strengthening outreach to young women, facilitating studies of women in ministry, enlarging the offerings of the WRC Web site, piloting programs with

LSU students that can be adapted to our colleges worldwide, strategic assessment and planning for more women in church leadership, and developing a comprehensive network of support for women clergy. "It was through the seminars and resources of the Center, along with the Association of Adventist Women and Time for Equality in Adventist Ministry, that I caught the vision of God's full calling for women. I have long had a passion for ministering to women and look forward to further empowering them to achieve the dreams God puts into their hearts."

Larry Geraty, president of La Sierra, comments, "I'm delighted the WRC has been able to attract as its director such a capable, experienced leader. Heidi Ford is someone who has already run a non-profit organization, edited a women's journal, taught courses, served internationally, and spoken on the camp meeting/women's retreat circuit. Adventist women and men both are indeed fortunate." *AW*



Heide Ford

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"importance of gender and attending to the often different impacts of economic and social policies on women and men;" by affirming "that a world connected by technology and trade must also be connected by shared values, norms of behavior, and systems of accountability."⁷

In this compressed world in which we live, we have many opportunities to become much more intensely conscious of the world as a whole. Because it is easier now to become more closely linked with women around the world, our relative prosperity can be shared with our sisters in other parts of the world, where our dollars still have inordinate impact. Three hundred fifty dollars will keep a girl in boarding high school in Kenya for one year, sparing her the otherwise inevitable early marriage and undeveloped life. Fifty dollars to \$100 will make it possible for a rural Kenyan woman to start a small business, transforming her self-esteem and giving her the dignity of simple choices in her life. Many of us have the financial capacity to give such empowerment to another woman.

In addition, we can speak out for the voiceless in their quest for justice. Globalization and modern technology

have swung open the door to such opportunities in an unprecedented way. Will our voices promote the advancement of women to more fulfilling lives enhanced by education and opportunity, or will our silence leave them to struggle against unconscionable odds?

1. Nayan Chanda, "What is Globalization?" *YaleGlobal Online*, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/about/>.
2. Mohamad Hussein Abu Al-Ola, "Globalization and Values: A Contemporary Paradox," www.globalenvision.org/library/8/566/.
3. Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century*, Farrow, Straus & Giroux, 2005.
4. Nayan Chanda, "What is Globalization?" *YaleGlobal Online*, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/about/>.
5. Jan Aart Scholte, "Five definitions of 'globalization,'" *infed encyclopaedia*, www.infed.org/biblio/defining_globalization.htm.
6. Lawrence K. Altman, "U. N. Official Assails South Africa on Its Response to AIDS," *New York Times*, August 19, 2006.
7. Mary Robinson, "What is Ethical Globalization?" www.eginitiative.org. [Mary Robinson is the Executive Director of the Ethical Globalization Initiative. She served as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights from 1997 to 2002 and as President of Ireland from 1990-1997.] *AW*