



## CONFERENCE ON WORLD MISSION AND EVANGELISM

### *COME HOLY SPIRIT - HEAL AND RECONCILE*

Called in Christ to be reconciling and healing communities

**Athens (Greece), 9-16 May 2005**

Translated from the Spanish  
Language Service, WCC

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# PLEN 11 May

Document No **3**

**Embargoed against delivery**

### **A PERSONAL TESTIMONY**

I was born into a Christian home, the daughter and granddaughter of Pentecostal pastors. I was brought up and educated with love and devotion, being the youngest child with two older brothers.

From childhood I was given instruction on the Christian way and learned to love Jesus. When I came to an understanding of the plan of salvation, I was baptized and received the gift of the Holy Spirit with speaking in tongues.

From my youngest days, I took part in church work. I was a teacher, and later the superintendent, in the Sunday School, youth leader, and a teacher in Bible study courses. I studied in preparation for Christian service and have worked, and still do, in all sorts of useful activities.

I have two daughters who are twenty and eighteen years old, both of them faithful to God and active in the church.

I have been separated for fifteen years and divorced for twelve.

God has been faithful to me and never disappointed me. With his help I have been able to move forward, run my household, and support it financially, emotionally and spiritually. Christ has freed me, not only from sin, but also from all emotional hang-ups that could hold me back.

Since we are considering the theme "Come, Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile", it seems to me that it could be helpful to give my testimony on this...

When I was 31 years old, I married a man of the same age after being engaged for one year and two months. I had noticed that he had some personality problems, but I thought that with my love, understanding and ability to solve problems they could be dealt with. I excused his attitude because of his family background and convinced myself that it would all be different when we got married, because he was basically a good decent person and he loved me very much.

Soon after we were married I realized that it was not going to be easy to live together, but I was emotionally stable and I believed that it was a situation that I could cope with.

But, as it turned out, the more time passed, the more difficult things became. We were almost always arguing.

His sudden mood changes confused me: at one moment I was utter rubbish, and at other times he wept, begging my forgiveness, and saying that I was the best woman in the world!

He swung so easily from being aggressive to being tender and loving, that my mind and my feelings could not cope.

He blamed me for everything that went wrong in the home, with my daughters, with him. If I was not able to solve a problem for him, it was my fault, and he often gave up working, because, he said, the problems got on his nerves.

I became the head of the household, financially, emotionally and spiritually, but it was leaving me physically and emotionally drained.

To begin with, I tried to hide the situation, but later I came to see that we needed help, and so I approached my church for assistance. The pastor and the leaders attempted to help us by giving us advice and supporting us in order to save our marriage. As it was a difficult situation, the pastor recommended us to go to a specialist marriage guidance counsellor. To begin with, my husband refused to go, because he believed that no one from outside could solve our internal problems. So, at the suggestion of the counsellor, I began attending alone, until, because of my persistence, he did agree to come with me. We did receive counselling for a time, but then the counsellor decided that what was needed was psychological treatment, due to my husband's emotional instability, which he flatly refused. So, with him promising to change his ways and asking for forgiveness, we continued a little longer, but we went back to the same situation and I did not manage to change it.

I became so exhausted that I lost all motivation and felt that my life was meaningless. I was in tears for more time than I could imagine, I was becoming a zombie, and came to understand why it was that there were people who took their own lives. I blamed God for what was happening to me, thinking that it was not fair, because I had lived a good life, serving God, but the Holy Spirit reminded me of past situations, and I seemed to hear inwardly his sweet voice saying to me, "My daughter, I kept on telling you again and again, but you made the decision".

When I accepted that I had made the wrong decision, I asked God for forgiveness and received strength from where I had none and decided to do something to put my own life in order. I began by talking with my pastor in order to receive advice according to the Word of God. I remember that I said to him, "I am not getting any younger and I am making no progress in finding a solution to my problem. I should like to separate from my husband, but I do know that God disapproves of my decision and so I grit my teeth and keep going with the relationship, even though it is destroying me, because I do not want to do anything displeasing to God." I can still hear in my mind my pastor's words, which made sense to me, when he said this was not the God we preach. We believe in a forgiving and merciful God. Merciful means that he is giving you another chance. God wants your good and your personal fulfilment, and so he would not compel you to keep up a relationship that is destroying you. If you want to be a martyr and continue, that is your decision and not God's, but you will have to accept the logical consequences of being separated.'

It did not prove possible to change the other person. I did not succeed in saving my marriage, but it was possible to rebuild my own life, and so I decided on a separation. My daughters were two and four years old, and I was physically and emotionally ill and spiritually depressed.

The doctors dealt with my low physical condition. With the support of family, friends and the church community I recovered emotionally, and they helped me to grow stronger spiritually so that I could be useful to God, to my family, to society and to the Church.

At that time I offered to resign from my church activities, because, as I was separated from my husband, I did not wish to be a cause of conflict in the congregation, but the leaders and the community did not accept my resignation. They put it like this, “It’s as if you had been knocked down by a truck – you are injured, but you are still alive – and our job is not to bury you but to find the necessary means by which you can be healed and restored.”

My husband stopped attending our church, because he thought that in practice they should have made me persevere with our marriage, and he accused me of adultery because of my decision to separate. He was advised by our pastor to receive pastoral care from another pastor in a different church in order to recover. A pastor friend of his took him on and devoted much time and energy to him, but, every time that he seemed to be recovering, he again relapsed, fell out with the leaders and stopped attending the church, or moved to another one.

The days following were not easy. My young daughters lived with me in my parents’ home and spent the weekends with their father. I had to provide for my daughters, because their father has never, to this very day, contributed to maintaining them, and, to top it all, he tried to turn them against the church, my father – whom the girls adored – and me by saying that we were in the wrong, and this gave rise to constant arguments.

A further heavy blow was when I discovered that he was drinking heavily. Not knowing the situation, I was leaving the girls in his care for part of each weekend, but one day he got drunk in their presence, and that further damaged relationships, both with me and with my daughters, who were frightened and bewildered. Despite everything, we did not reject him, but tried to make him understand that he should seek help in order to regain his self-respect, but that the decision was his.

For my part, I used all the resources provided by the church (pastoral counselling, healing groups, workshops and retreats) to recover and experience healing, not only of my own wounds but also those of my daughters.

On the other hand, I had recovered physically, but I was still carrying a heavy emotional burden, because I had counselled many young people and I was feeling that, having failed in my marriage, I was not being a good example. And then, in a meeting which we called “With open hearts”, where we could express our feelings and receive positive ideas from other group members that would help us to surmount our problems, I was given healing words, especially from two young people. One young man said to me “on the day when you forgive yourself, we shall all be more happy”. And a girl said to me, “I have known you for as long as I can remember, and I can remember every book that you have given me and every piece of advice that you have given me. I have always admired you and that has not changed. I want to be like you”. Then some mothers asked me to continue advising their daughters. I believe that on that day God used those individuals in our community to enable me to recover and to tell me that I still had a lot to give.

Later, with the support of members of the congregation I was able to take out a loan to buy an apartment, where I am at present living with my two daughters.

Today I can say that my inner wounds have been bound up and healed by a community that has known how to work with me and be alongside me, and they have been healed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So I am able to give my testimony without feeling pain as I do so, and with the intention that it will serve to help others experiencing conflict. I have been reconciled with myself, and in my dealings with my ex-husband. I do not feel bitter towards him and I wish him well and that he will recover.

My daughters have been taught to respect and help their father, even though they do not share his ideas or his lifestyle. And today, as young women who have grown up in a healing community, they try to ignore many problems with their father, so as to avoid a breakdown in their relationship with him and to see if it is possible for him to rebuild his life. They are both working, and studying at the university. They love God with all their heart and share actively in the life of the church.

At the present time, I am the Executive Secretary of my church, and of ministries such as “Crusade to every Home” and “International Bible Society”. I work full time in the service of the church. I work closely with the pastor and am a member of his team, and that enables me to put my point of view as a woman in the service of the church.

Today I realize how important it is to be a healing community, but I also realize that it is a personal decision. There is nothing magical about it. It is a process that begins when we want it to, and decide to walk each day obeying and being faithful to God, to our leaders, and to the community that gives us a sense of security.

I am convinced and I want to say that we must ourselves take responsibility for changing what is negative into something positive with the authority and strength given us by the Spirit of God. It is my desire that many can say with me:

“Thank you, Holy Spirit, for healing me and reconciling me to myself, to the society around me, and especially to those who at some time or another have caused me pain.”