

CWEENS

Christian Women for Excellence and Empowerment in Nigerian Society

How CWEENS Began

January 2010 – was that an earthquake, an avalanche, a watershed or what? Some would describe the onslaught of violent attacks on Plateau state in such terms. And, that was what it took for the hearts of women on the Plateau to be stirred up to articulate a plan of action for the transformation of society. It all began on Saturday 6th February, 2010 at 2 pm when six women – Dr. Funmi Para-Mallam, Mrs Esther Wazhi, Mrs Grace Chikan, Mrs Asabe Toyé, Mrs Elizabeth Rimdams and Ms. Margaret Dimka – met in the home of Mrs Esther Wazhi, a former Plateau State Commissioner, bound by a common faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and a shared sense of anguish and indignation at the violence that had rocked Jos city and environs. The first point of concern at that maiden meeting was the need to organise a protest march to the National Assembly in Abuja in order to set the record straight in the national psyche as to who the real aggressor was in the Jos crisis. It was believed this was necessary because the Hausa-Fulani Muslim women had gone ahead to stage manage a march to make the spurious claim before the National Assembly of being the aggrieved. A communiqué titled: “Enough is Enough!” was presented by Funmi Para-Mallam for that purpose; it was read, amended and adopted by the women. The vision was also shared of a network of praying women that would usher in social change through prayer, political engagement and social action. In order to chart a way forward the women decided to embark on a three-day fasting and prayer programme from 8th – 10th February, 2010.

Other women joined in the three-day fasting and prayer. They were Mrs Susan Janfa, former SSG, Pastor Gloria Emmanuel and Mrs Monica Gwom. During the meeting the Lord spoke clearly and powerfully about the purpose and direction the group was to take in laying a prayer foundation for social engagement, particularly in respect of the Plateau State crisis. He made it clear that His desire was to unite women across denominational, ethnic and social class divides into a powerful voice and force for change. The Lord also made it clear that the women were to seek his face concerning exactly what it was he wanted them to do and how. This was to be a network of women that would spread throughout Nigeria whose members would work together without stifling power hierarchies but in a spirit of mutual respect for each other’s gifting and calling. During that time, the Lord laid it on the heart of Funmi Para-Mallam

that the group would be called Christian Women for Excellence and Empowerment in Nigerian Society (CWEENS) with the motto: *Blessed and anointed for great purposes*. Thus, CWEENS was born. On the day the fast was to round up the Lord challenged the women to extend it to 21 days, this time meeting and praying in pairs or groups in their localities. The fast ended on 28th February with most of the women attending a joint prayer and fasting session with the Jos City Intercessory Group.

Later that day the ladies met briefly again in the home of Esther Wazhi who had had an accident at the end of one of the cell group prayer meetings and had been hospitalized. At that meeting the women asked, "Lord, what next?" The need to organize a march came up once again. Previously, during the 21-day programme Mrs Grace Lanan had been sent with a write-up from Professor Mary Lar to liaise with concerned women so as to organize a protest march. Between Sunday 7th and Monday 8th March Mrs Esther Wazhi, Mrs Grace Lanan and Dr Funmi Para-Mallam began the process mobilizing rural and urban women in Jos and surrounding villages for a March on 9th March. By Monday morning women leaders of Nigerian Women Pray, Wailing Women, Berom Women Association, The Anglican Communion, ECWA Women Fellowship, Catholic Women Association, National Council of Women Societies, and Christian NGO Forum had been informed. Ngo Dr. Naomi Jugun was the arrowhead for mobilizing the Berom Women. However, at around 11 am, while Dr Para-Mallam and Mrs Lanan were meeting to decide on a combined draft communiqué and map out modalities for the march, Mrs Elizabeth Rimdans called with the information that Pastor Esther Ibanga of JCMI and Mrs Josephine Ewuga were organizing a similar march to take place on Thursday 11th March. It was immediately decided that it would be much more effective and expedient to join forces with them. Later Pastor Ibanga shared how she too had been instructed by the Holy Spirit to go on a 21-day fast, although she did not know what for at the time.

Thus, under the nomenclature of Women on the Plateau for Peace and under the inspiration and leadership of the Holy Spirit the two groups collaborated to organize a peaceful protest march of thousands of women from Jos and environs. The marchers took off from ECWA Headquarters Church where, after a session of praise worship, Bible sharing and prayer, the Pastor of the Church Rev. Jerry Bupwadta led prayers and the Vice-President and General Secretary encouraged the women. Thousands of women dressed in black marched weeping and singing as they went along; some on crutches and walking sticks, others with babies on their back; the young, the elderly and the sick – all marched with deep anguish of soul to protest what was obvious to them as a premeditated and well-orchestrated attack on Plateau State.