

WOMEN'S WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

(INTERNATIONAL AND INTERDENOMINATIONAL)



6th March 2015



BACKGROUND INFORMATION



**Jesus said to them:
Do you know what I have done to you?**

THE BAHAMAS

Geography

The Bahamas is an expanse of water made up of over 700 scattered islands, hence the name archipelago, covering over 100,000 square miles of water in the Atlantic Ocean. Only a small number of the islands are inhabited. The two main islands are New Providence and Grand Bahama; the rest are called 'Family' or 'Out' islands.

The most northerly island, Bimini, is approximately 52 miles off the coast of Florida, USA and from the southernmost island of Inagua one can see the lights of Cuba and Haiti. The islands are very flat with Mount Alvernia (in Cat Island) as their highest point, a peak only 206 feet high. The largest island, Andros, is 104 miles long by 40 miles wide at the widest point. The Andros Barrier Reef is the world's third longest after Australia's Great Barrier Reef and the Central American Belize Barrier Reef.

The Bahamas lies in the tropics so the temperature is warm for most of the year, with the hottest months (June to October) being subject to hurricanes.

Flora and Fauna

A variety of wildlife can be found both on land and in the sea. Near the beaches you can find crabs, snails, urchins, starfish and even sharks. Further inland you will find protected species such as lizards and rock iguanas, together with over one hundred and forty species of native and migratory birds. Inagua is home to over 80,000 beautiful pink flamingos which are the national birds of The Bahamas. There are few mammals.

The flora includes 1,370 different species of trees and plants, 221 of which are found only in these islands.

Population

The latest census listed a total population of over 353,600 of which nearly 249,000 live on the island of New Providence, where the government is located in Nassau. The island of Grand Bahama, which boasts the nation's second largest city, has a population of nearly 52,000 and only six other islands have populations of 3,000 and over.

The descendants of the African slaves constitute about 86% of the present day population, and the official language is English intertwined with a special Bahamian dialect, peculiar to most of the islands and known as 'Smokey Joe'.

History and Politics

Recorded history begins in 1492 when Christopher Columbus' first expedition landed on the Island of Guanahani (now known as San Salvador). The Spaniards enslaved and decimated the native Indian population but did not stay to colonise the islands; they continued their search for gold in other places.

- 1647 brought the earliest permanent European settlement and in 1666 English settlers established a colony on New Providence.
- 1713 saw an estimated 1,000 pirates in The Bahamas, outnumbering the 200 families of more permanent settlers.
- 1802 was the year in which the British government brought about an end to the slave trade.
- During World War II the Allies centred their flight training and anti-submarine operations for the Caribbean in The Bahamas. The wartime airfield became

Nassau's international airport in 1957 and helped spur the growth of mass tourism.

- Until 1953, the Parliament was controlled by a white minority.
- The women's suffrage movement secured the vote for women, but not until 1962.
- The Bahamas achieved self-government in 1964 and full independence within the commonwealth in 1973.
- Today the country is a constitutional monarchy and Queen Elizabeth II is the Head of State.

Health and Education

The Bahamas' national health care system is delivered through clinics and health centres, sometimes requiring airlifts for specialised care to government or private facilities, and often involving overcrowding and long waiting times.

Education is seen as the vital key to progress. In 1722, a missionary society brought education to the children of The Bahamas so that they could participate in church worship. Slave owners were informed that this must happen and slaves were taught to read and write. By 1878 primary education was compulsory for all children. At present government school attendance is compulsory between the ages of five and sixteen.

Art, Culture and Cuisine

The Bahamian way of life is rooted in a unique blend of the customs and traditions brought by the British, who colonised The Bahamas for over three hundred years, and the West Africans, who were brought by the British as slaves. The spirit of the people is celebrated in art and crafts, music, dance, theatre, fashion, cuisine, cinema, and storytelling. In New Providence, from the National Art Gallery to the annual Junkanoo parades, the richness and vibrancy of Bahamian culture is on daily display.

Junkanoo is a festive parade which takes place traditionally in the early hours of both Boxing Day and New Year's Day, ending after sunrise. Wearing colourful crepe paper costumes, people parade to the tune of cowbells, drums, whistles and horns. The movement is a slow, dancing march which Bahamians call 'rushing'.

The African influence is reflected in the cuisine with foodstuffs such as okra, cassava and sweet potatoes. The arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492 brought the European influence: Irish potatoes and the famous potato salad. As The Bahamas is surrounded by ocean there is plenty of seafood available and in many islands families raise livestock for consumption. Many desserts and sweets are made from local fruits such as guava, coconut and pineapple.

Women

Bahamian women were hard workers in the slave economy. Since then they have been mainly involved in paid domestic work. Outside of the main islands there are few work opportunities for poor women with low levels of formal education and little has changed. In the Family islands most mothers are single parents and hold domestic jobs in hotels or restaurants.

In 1992 the first woman was elected to Parliament and since then the country has had female presidents of the Court of Appeal and Senate, a deputy and governor general and even a deputy prime minister.

Women have little status under law. They do not yet have equal rights of citizenship for spouses and for children born outside The Bahamas.

Some churches and many women believe that a husband has a right over his wife's body and have opposed legislation to change this, which means that women cannot be protected from being raped by their husbands.

Bahamian society requires mothers to take sole responsibility for their families, including husbands or partners, often to the detriment of their own health and well-being. Also women are looked down upon for committing the very same crimes for which men are quickly forgiven.

Women continue to look to the church for their social life.

Religion

The Bahamas is overwhelmingly Christian and has been since 1647 when a group of English Puritans from Bermuda, in search of religious freedom, settled on the island of Citago, which they renamed Eleuthera, meaning 'freedom'.

Today the churches are impacting on The Bahamas in practical ways, including running drug rehabilitation centres, working with people with HIV and AIDS and numerous social and street programmes.

WDP in The Bahamas

The first WDP service was held in 1950 in Nassau and was organised by the wife of the Presbyterian minister. Most of the Presbyterian ministers serving in The Bahamas came from Scotland and so it is presumed that they used the order of service produced by the Scottish national committee.

WDP is now celebrated in six islands and is expected to involve all of the inhabited islands when the service is celebrated in 2015.

For more information about The Bahamas see the Together in Prayer magazine available from the WWDP office.