PITTSBURGH WOMEN HELP GIRLS THRIVE IN ZIMBABWE

For immediate release

On Sunday, September 10, about 100 Pittsburgh-area women will hold a “sewing party” to help prevent girls in Zimbabwe from missing school for lack of sanitary protection. The party, open to the public, will be held from 3-6 p.m. at Mt. Lebanon United Methodist Church, 3319 W. Liberty Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15216.

Volunteers will cut material and assemble kits that can be used to make a reusable cloth sanitary napkin. Each kit also contains underwear, soap, needle and thread, absorbent inserts, and hygiene information.

The grass-roots effort, known as the Girl Empowerment Pad (GEP) program, began in 2011. Its success led to its elevation as an official program of The Nyadire Connection (TNC), a non-denominational, non-profit partnering with the Nyadire mission outside Harare, Zimbabwe, and based at Christ United Methodist Church (CUMC) in Bethel Park, PA.

“I imagine if you (or your mom or sister) could not go to work or school every month for lack of products,” says Bonnie Lawson, GEP Director and a retired Bayer executive. “This problem resonated with Pittsburgh women, who jumped at the chance to partner with Zimbabweans to change girls’ lives in a concrete way.”

Zimbabwe partners selected the pad design, and are training about 150 interested girls from the Nyadire Primary and Hearing Impaired Schools, plus five collaborating rural primary schools. Last year, the schools received 1500 kits shipped in containers supplied by the Pittsburgh-based Brothers Brother Foundation (BBF), and more than 600 girls received education in menstrual hygiene management.

The program continues to rack up successes. For example, Zimbabwean teachers identified the need for age- and culturally appropriate instructional materials. Lawson secured more than 150 books written by Annie Kanyemba, called, Growing Up in School, written in English and Shona. The books were donated by Dr. Peter Roger Morgan, the recipient of numerous global health awards including the Stockholm Water Prize.

Although the kits allow pads to be sewn by hand, the GEP team also refurbishes donated sewing machines and converts the electric ones to manual hand crank mode, as power can be sporadic. The goal is to eventually provide five machines to each school, and to source all materials and labor for the kits in Zimbabwe.

About 100 women participated in the sewing party last year, with the venue changing at least twice since 2012 to accommodate the growing number of volunteers. Women of all ages and backgrounds sit around tables to cut fabric and chat; the event includes refreshments and prizes.

In addition to BBF and CUMC, other volunteers are from: First Bethel United Methodist Church (UMC); Mt. Lebanon UMC; Monongahela UMC; Mt. Pleasant UMC; First UMC of Bradford, and two other Bradford congregations (Evans Memorial and Hill Memorial); First Franklin UMC and two other Franklin congregations (Christ United and Grace UMC); St. Paul’s UMC; Baldwin UMC; Trinity UMC of Indiana; St. Louise Catholic Church; Episcopal Church of Atonement in Carnegie; the Women and Girls Foundation of Southwestern PA; Upper St. Clair High School, Sewickley Academy and Quaker Valley schools; and Zonta.

To attend the sewing party, please RSVP to Bonnie Lawson at 412-343-3498 or bonnielawson58@comcast.net. Bonnie can also provide information about a September 21 “friend-raiser” event that provides information on, and seeks volunteers for, TNC’s 15 programs in Zimbabwe.