

EFECW News

December 2022



Photo: Saša Montiljo

To You who hold and give time, I thank for everything and I ask You: Take all burdens, problems and conflicts from this year and turn them into blessings. May the joy of peace fill our souls. Forgive my ingratitude when I did not recognize Your goodness, free me from doubt and instill in my heart the readiness to receive You with joy. Come to our countries, homes, communities and connect us with Your grace to yourself, and for our greatest good. Give us new strength and faith With which we grow in Your love. Amen.

Marijana Ajzenkol, EFECW Co-President

EFECW Coordinating Committee meeting

27th-30th October 2022, Rabat, Malta

The first meeting of the newly elected Coordinating Committee (CC) of EFECW was held at Archbishop Seminary in Rabat, Malta. This meeting gave an opportunity to the CC on the one hand to get to know each other better and build a strong team and on the other hand to define the new priorities of the EFECW strategy for the next four years.



The 'before' and 'after' feelings of the newcomers in the CC were shared among members. Their main thoughts and questions were the following:

Who are they?

What kind of people they are?

What goals and plans do they have?

Can we think, work and plan together?

All these questions were answered after a one-day facilitated workshop activity included in the beginning of the meeting, which helped us discover each other's gift, talents, interests, etc., while discovering how to compliment and support each other to better accomplish the difficult leadership task entrusted to us by the General Assembly (GA).







During these three effective days, the new CC members, after sharing news since the last GA and being presented of different aspects of the work of the CC (including a session on finances with the presence of the Treasurer Gabriele Kienesberger) shared the duties and responsibilities among group members, after setting and deciding on the future goals and expectations.

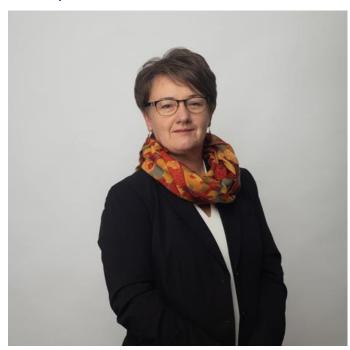


The following will be among the work priorities for the next four years:

- The empowerment of young, active, and new women in EFECW, by continuing to commit to the young women's strategy;
- The development of leadership skills of different age groups of women in EFECW through interactive webinars.
- Re-new and re-establish contacts with all national Forum members, especially those with fewer contacts, through neighborhood meetings and visits;
- Larger visibility and presence of EFECW especially in churches, religious, and civil organisations both at the national and European levels.
- Continue discussion on spirituality and safe space in EFECW.
- Rethinking the format of statutory (e.g. NC meeting) and other EFECW meetings.
- Develop different activities on peace, reconciliation, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

Marianna Apresyan, EFECW Co-President

First impressions...



My first CC meeting in Malta!

I was excited and curious when I arrived in Malta.

I was curious about those who have been members of the European board for a long time.

Who are they, what kind of people they are, what goals and plans they have?...

I was interested in where and how I would find my own place, will I find it at all?

Can we think, work and plan together?

The answer to all these questions is: yes!

We met, sang, work, planned together. All this in an open, creative community.

Thank you for your trust, encouragement, reception... Thank you for allowing me to find sisterhood among you.

Let's raise the flag of Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women and show it to the world! God bless all our work and the future of the Forum!



Judit Vincze, EFECW CC member

XIth General Assembly

5th – 9th August 2022, Strasbourg, France

Message

Hope and Responsibility: « ...always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you the reason for the hope that you have» (1 Peter 3,15)

In the year of the 40th anniversary of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women the XI General Assembly was held at C.I.A.R.U.S, Strasbourg, France. More than 80 participants, including over 20 young women, from 24 countries and all Christian traditions came together to share in prayer, fellowship, discussion and worship on the theme of "Hope and Responsibility". We thank the women of the French Forum for their hospitality and their efforts in organising this event.

This was the first meeting to take place in person since the Covid pandemic, and against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine. Even though Covid-19 had impacted our work and lives, it had not stopped us from moving forward and communicating with one another. We were glad to celebrate that we could now see and connect with each other face to face after so many virtual sessions. The presence of our sisters from Ukraine, who were able to join us, despite the war in their country, was very emotional and touched us all. A highlight of the General Assembly was a visit to the Palais de l'Europe, where we were received by Ambassador Marie Fontanelle, Permanent Representative of France to the Council of Europe. She spoke about human and women's rights, the ongoing work of the Council with the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) and the work of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) through the evaluation national reports.

As well as celebrating the past 40 years we took time to look ahead, so as to ensure we go forward sustainably, and continue the witness of the Forum across Europe in years to come. We identified our immediate priorities for the next four years.

We committed to speaking out with Hope and Responsibility:

In the world:

- Against harassment, abuse, rape, torture and violence against women in general and especially as a weapon of war.
- Against domestic violence.
- In support of equality, justice and peace.
- For the protection of human rights for all.
- About the contribution of women to peace-building.
- For the care of the environment and the promotion of climate justice

- To affirm the importance of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue.
- To empower and to encourage women to nurture and enrich their spirituality rooted in the Bible.

In the EFECW

- To increase the visibility of the EFECW in churches, ecumenical organisations and societies.
- To achieve the recognition and meaningful participation of women within our churches.
- By developing and supporting projects that contribute to the social, political and economic empowerment of women.
- By welcoming diversity through involving women of different generations, cultures, ethnicities, gender identity and sexual orientation, as well as women with disabilities.
- To ensure the voices of migrant and refugee women are heard and present among us. By relaunching Charta Oecumenica as a sign of hope (signed in Strasbourg in 2001).

The Forum has an important and distinctive witness within the life of our churches and in society. The new Coordinating Committee, elected at the General Assembly, is entrusted to develop an action plan to ensure the sustainability and renewal of the Forum.

The new Co-ordinating Committee is composed of:

Co-Presidents

Marijana Ajzenkol, Serbia, Roman Catholic

Marianna Apresyan, Armenia, Armenian Apostolic Church (Eastern Orthodox)

Carin Gardbring, Sweden, Lutheran

Coordinating Committee Members

Jelena Ljubenović, Serbia, Orthodox

Anthea Sully, UK-England, Methodist

Iudita Etelca Vincze, Romania, Reformed

Hannah Wehner, Germany, Lutheran

We are brought together as women of faith through God's Spirit. Renewed by our gathering, may we witness to the Hope of Christ within us.

Internship programme for young women

This year, the EFECW had introduced a new Interns programme which gave 15 young women from 11 different countries (speaking what seemed like 100 different languages!!!) the opportunity to share and develop their skills and to contribute to the discussion and overall 'message' of the General Assembly (GA). This year's theme: 'Hope and Responsibility'.



Team building activities ahead of the GA

As interns, we travelled to Strasbourg a few days before the rest of the delegates, to settle into our roles and get to know our colleagues. I had the role of Internship Leader, which I admit was extremely daunting at first, but nerves were soon settled after being thrown into lots of team building, planning and preparation. There were 6 different intern teams ranging from Social Media to Prayer and Spirituality. My role as one of two internship leaders was challenging but lots of fun: organising intern meetings, keeping interns updated, managing relationships, and keeping spirits high. Though the best part about my role was meeting and spending time with so many amazing young women, all with their own story to tell.

Following our "soft start" of getting to know the other interns and the Coordinating Committee for EFECW, the delegates arrived, and we were thrown into a jam-packed schedule of business meetings, workshops, trips out and discussions which left me, amongst others truly exhausted!

World Café

A popular event from the forum was the World Café. Each intern was assigned a table with a different topic. We had to facilitate discussions as the delegates moved round the different tables. The topics on the tables this time were: Modern European Realities; challenges and hopes; Ecumenism & women's situation in European countries; EFECW's National Forum's news; and Christian Women's hopes and responsibilities in these turbulent times.

Council of Europe

As part of the GA in Strasbourg, we were invited to visit the Council of Europe. It was here we engaged in discussion with Madame Marie Fontalel, France's permanent Representative to the Council of Europe. We were given the opportunity to ask opinions and pose questions most of which centred around the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe's convention of preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence), which madame Fontanel spoke passionately about.



Sisterhood

My biggest "take away" from the GA was the overwhelming sense of sisterhood that enveloped the entire forum. With every debate, discussion, and prayer the common goal and sense of women's empowerment was present in the atmosphere. With this brought forth opportunity to discuss topics that may be seen as 'difficult' and to express opinions knowing those listening were also women and would have understanding and empathy when listening with an ear.

At the end of each GA, a group of women who attend the forum, gather notes and ideas from all workshops and discussions to create an overall "Message" from the assembly, which carries and directs the Forum's goals and actions for the next 4 years and beyond. Some of the key themes in our 'Message' were inclusivity of the Forum, the Forum's continued stance and action on the global issue of gender-based violence, and interreligious dialogue, amongst many other important issues we hope to address within the coming years. I still have lots to learn about the Forum and how it operates and serves but I am looking forward to seeing how it operates in between Assemblies.

Nicole Grant, Internship Leader

Women portraits present at the GA

Young interns to the GA met online and prepared for their tasks several weeks prior to their arrival in Strasbourg. One of their ideas, presented here, was to share stories of delegates to the GA on social media.

Natalia Horbal



My name is Natalia and I'm from Lviv, Ukraine. I am a member of EFECW Coordinating Committee (CC) and a National Coordinator (NC) for Ukraine.

My "soviet childhood" did not allow learning foreign languages. Travelling abroad was just a dream. Luckily, in 1991, Ukraine became independent, borders were opened... and my very first application to an international youth training was successful! There, in the Czech Republic, my friends and I, met Cath Moss, who invited us to join her organisation ENYA (Ecumenical Network for Youth Actions) and later – the EFECW. It may be difficult to understand now, especially to EU citizens, but ENYA and other European youth events suddenly opened

completely new horizons for us! We learned so much, especially about Europe and ecumenism, found new friends and ideas and of course started to speak English. One of my favorites was the 2-year Adelheid project (in Czech Republic and Great Britain), which helped participants a lot in their professional and personal life and made them close friends for decades. Another stunning and fateful event was a summer academy in Boldern, Switzerland. Kindness and warmth of organisers and participants of those European events for us, ex-soviet youth, were just unimaginable at the beginning but immediately so inspiring and even "contagious"! How great it is now to meet at Forum's events and to work together with former participants of those youth events!

In 2000, I participated in the EFECW's National Coordinators' meeting in Thessaloniki, Greece as a steward. Thus, it was more than natural to accept an invitation of representatives of the Swiss Forum (who participated in ENYA events in Lviv) to become a delegate from Ukraine to the Forum's 6th GA in Celakovice, Czech Republic in 2002. What an unforgettable and impressive experience! What strong, active and influential women!

I wasn't very active in Forum when my children were small and I'm extremely grateful to the Swiss Forum who helped me again – this time to return to EFECW in 2014 – to the GA in Tinos. At that time the war started in Ukraine (a), and I will remember my whole life our joint prayers for peace in different beautiful churches on that holy island!

In 2015 I was honored to participate in the first ever European ecumenical 'Pop Up Monastery', organized by EFECW. In 2015-2016 Ukrainian Forum participated in implementation of a 2-year project "Marginalised single mothers and their children overcoming extreme poverty: empowerment programme towards long term sustainability" for 84 single mothers from 5 countries.

Xth Forum's GA in 2018 became extremely memorable, - I was nominated and chosen as a Coordinating committee member. In this role, it was so honorable, interesting and useful to

participate in a neighborhood meeting in Armenia the next year. I remember participants' eyes full of tears when Ukrainians showed a presentation about victims of the still going on war 🙁 .

Ukrainians are extremely grateful for all prayers and support we received from Forum participants since 24th February, when our country was treacherously hit again by Russia. Since then, at least 25 thousand people were killed, almost 400 children among them, 9 million people became refugees, 117 thousand residential buildings, 800 schools and 185 religious institutions were ruined or significantly damaged....

The war is still going on; the whole Europe is in danger... I'm so sorry but at the XIth General Assembly I am asking you again "Please pray for Ukraine!"



Martina Heinrichs



My name is Martina Heinrichs. I was born in 1955 in Western Germany. I studied French and Catholic Theology in Germany and in France to become a teacher at the Secondary School. When I was 24 years old, I moved to the Netherlands because of Feminist Theology which was not available in my own country.

Catharina Halkes (1920-2011) brought this new theology in the late seventies and early eighties of the last century from the USA to the Netherlands and to more European countries. She was also involved in many women's networks, and she was one of the founding mothers of EFECW. I worked together with her at the university of Nijmegen. Later I moved on to adult education work with women in protestant academies or adult education centers.

In the nineties we set up ecumenical women's synods in the Netherlands. Other European countries followed. In 1996 the first European Women's Synod took place in Gmunden, Austria.

Through my involvement with EFECW which started in 1986 when our Honorary President Ruth Epting (1919- 2016) called me for bible studies, I got a widespread network of contacts with women from all over Europe and many denominations. Very exiting! We started several projects, interesting conferences and friendships between women. We reached out to women from other continents and from other faith communities. During two terms I served EFECW as one of the three Co-Presidents from 2006 to 2014. Currently, I am responsible for the link of EFECW in the worldwide women's prayer movement 'Fellowship of The Least Coin', representing European Christian Women and their projects. So, I am still involved in EFECW and I enjoy it very much.

I wish the Forum a bright and vivid future to come. As women of faith, we need such networks and safe places to keep enthousiasm, belief and solidarity alive and to develop our own ways of expressing them.

Very recently I retired from my (paid) work which has been for the last 22 years in a Dominican Priory and Retreat Center in the Netherlands. This new phase in life gives me more time to relax and to be with my family of three adult children, a daughter and two sons, their partners as well as our first grandchild of one and a half years old. And of course, I hope to stay healthy and continue my voluntary work with women internationally and worldwide, and with refugees and migrants in my town Nijmegen.



Blog Lili Vlady

I am Lilit, active, positive thinking individual, that likes meeting challenges and always strives to develop as individual.

How I started my journey in EFECW? In 2016 I learnt about an ecumenical camp for girls organized by Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women in Armenia and decided to volunteer in it and organize morning physical training for the participants. It was a great experience for me as I learnt about the concept of Ecumenism, acquired organizational skills, interacted with the organizers and children. I loved the idea so much that just the same year decided to become a



member of EFECW. Since then, every year I have been participating in the camps and meetings.

In 2018, along with Araksia Avchieva, I participated in the Assembly of the Conference of European Churches in Serbia as a steward. I was representing Armenian Apostolic Church and Araksi Assyrian Apostolic Church. The conference enriched me not only with the understanding of church relations in Europe among youth but also helped me to set directions of the ecumenical future.

During my voluntary work at the CEC General Assembly, I assisted with communication, interpretation services, prayers and floor management. I was engaged in exchange of knowledge related to Ecumenical movement in Europe. This year I was accepted as an intern, in Strasbourg EFECW. I hope that our cooperation will continue for many years to come.

Constanze Spranger

Casa Comun in Karlsruhe 🏗 🛱 🚴 🔏 🛗



Here is Constanze Spranger from Germany writing.

At the moment, I'm active in the "Casa Comun 2022" Team and we organize this event during the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Karlsruhe. For the first time, this worldwide church event will take place in Germany. Decisions will be made that will be crucial for the work of the worldwide ecumenical movement for years to come.

What is Casa Comun? A Forum – open for everyone – that wants to accompany the Assembly process critically by strengthening options for prophetic practice.

Our Common House (Casa Comun) 2022, located south of Karlsruhe Main Station, situated in the surroundings of Karlsruhe Stadtkloster invites to:

- Political morning prayers ► hearings & workshops ► spaces for informal meet-ups ► panel discussions ► theater, music ► world café ► exhibitions...Would you like to be part of it? Then get in touch!
- ➤ Sept. 1st: Economy/Capitalism/Finance & Digitalization ➤ 2.9. Climate ➤ 3.9. Healing and liberation ➤ 4.9. War and peace ➤ 5.9. Migration ➤ 6.9 Feminism ➤ Sept. 7: Globalization & division of societies into rich and poor

As Christians we want to be part of the social movements that break with the supposed lack of alternatives and intend to build the future of a good life for all. The participation is free of charge. We ask for donations to finance the Casa Comun program.

Donations account Pro Ökumene e.V.Purpose: Casa Comun

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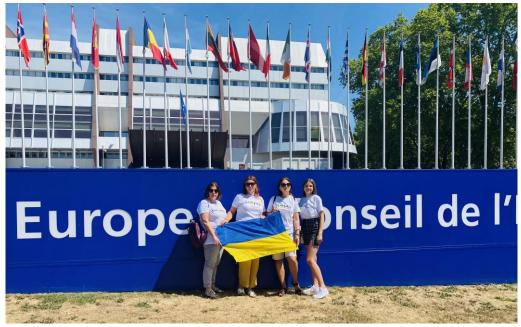
Message from the Ukrainian delegates

Christian virtue – hope, which was the slogan of the XIth EFECW General Assembly (Strasbourg, France) and is for most of us "an anchor for the soul, sure and strong" (Hebrews 6:19), – has become especially relevant for Ukrainian women in the difficult war conditions in recent years.



The Ukrainian delegation at the Assembly was represented by Natalia Horbal, Kateryna Doloshytska, Nadiya Lutsiv, Iryna Mentynska, in particular, Nadiya, Iryna and Kateryna took part in an event of such importance and scale for the first time. Due to the difficult and uncertain situation in Ukraine, the Forum participants were worried whether they would get to the Assembly at all, but at the same time they really wanted to represent their country at such an important event. Despite a long and tiring journey, the Ukrainian women managed to arrive at the Assembly on time.

Nadiya recalls: "We were pleasantly surprised by the warm and hospitable welcome of the hosts of the Forum from the first to the last minute, the strong support of guests from other countries. Every day we felt cared for, not only in words, but also in deeds. Sincere smiles, joint prayers, discussions and photos, small gifts contributed to a friendly, inspiring atmosphere. And the reception at the Council of Europe will be remembered for the rest



of our lives!" Iryna adds: "Great organization of the Forum's work, relevant and well-thought-out questions for discussion, spiritual conversations on themes that are relevant today did not leave any participant indifferent. There was complete understanding, deep respect and friendly cooperation among almost 80 participants of different ages from 24 different countries".

The new participants learned a lot about the Forum, its structure and saw coordinated work at the Assembly. They also had the opportunity to meet wonderful women who achieved success in various spheres of life, and befriended many of them.



Moreover, Strasbourg itself is love for a lifetime! It is impossible to describe in words unrivaled beauty of the city: streets, bridges, parks, churches...

We are grateful to the organizers and all participants of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women for all your support and prayers, which strengthened our hope, for unforgettable and such useful days spent in a warm, homely atmosphere and for.... incredible French desserts (3)



With huge gratitude and love, Ukrainian delegation

News from the members

Western Balkan neighbourhood meeting

"Women and migration from the Western Balkans", 7-9 October 2022, Novi Sad, Serbia

The Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization (EHO) from Novi Sad, Serbia organised in the period from October 7 to 9, 2022, as part of its ecumenical women's work, a regional conference entitled "Women and Migration from the Western Balkans" in Novi Sad. During this three-day conference, women from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Croatia took part.

The aim of the meeting was to bring together women from the region who participate in the work and development of women's ecumenical organisations and actively advocate for the improvement of the living conditions of women in these areas. The questions and topics they dealt with during this meeting concerned the migration of women and difficulties during the whole process, interpersonal relations and the like. They also discussed the migration of young people from



the Balkans and the problems they face when leaving in search of a better future. It is a fact that women face gender-specific difficulties in their everyday life at any stage of their migratory status. For all the participating women, the meeting was valuable because they were able to connect more deeply and discuss potential future meetings and cooperation within the framework of ecumenical activities.



The message from this regional ecumenical gathering in Novi Sad is to keep in mind that God calls us constantly to care for the humiliated and rejected. Therefore, it is important that we work within our capabilities to accept and help those who walk on difficult existential paths in search of a better and safer life.

Jelena Ljubenović, EFECW CC member

40th anniversary of ÖFCFE, 4-5 November 2022, Bamberg, Germany

We greet you during our General Assembly amidst the festivity for 40 years of the German forum. We remember the beginnings and the names of the founding women.





Many stories came up including many of you and your countries \bigcirc \bigcirc \bigcirc



Read more: <u>www.oekumeneforum.de</u>

Women's strength is "doing it despite it all"

Obituary for Dr. Reinhild Traitler-Espiritu,

Grand Dame of the ecumenical movement and women's dialogue



Reinhild Traitler. Photo: Nata Hovorkovà

Born on February 24th, 1940, in Berlin to a German theologian and an Austrian father, Reinhild made her way as a citizen of the world, a committed teacher, dedicated protester and unswerving advocator for peace. She studied Philosophy in Vienna, Austria, and got involved with the Protestant Students Community.

During her work as a travel secretary to the Protestant Students Community she met the Filipino jurist, economist, and diplomat Augusto Caesar Espiritu (+1993), who would later on become her husband. In the 1970s Reinhild Traitler went on to work for the World Council of Churches in Geneva, where she managed the department for development politics and intercultural education. During her time in Geneva she worked very closely with the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire, whose approach and

methods had a great impact on her.

From 1984 to 2003 she was the director of the Protestant Academic Centre in Boldern, near Zurich, Switzerland.



Participants of EPIL visited His Holiness Aram I, the spiritual head of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Antelias, Lebanon in February 2013

As a networker she took part in numerous European organisations – most with a focus on women's issues. Furthermore, she co-founded the Women's Summer Academy and participated in EFECW, the German Protestant Church Congress and the Interreligious Think-Tank in Switzerland.

In the early 2000s, Reinhild and her long-time Armenian friend, Tenny Piri-Simonian, founded the European Project for Interreligious Learning EPIL.

A multitude of Muslim and Christian women from all over Europe, including Lebanon, could profit from EPIL. Reinhild's credo always was: "It's not about blurring the difference, but about withstanding the differences and discovering their positive potential."



Meeting of the EPIL board in Luzern, Switzerland, 2012

As a member of the ecumenical Iona Community from Scotland she played a major role in cofounding the Austrian Iona group and was their patron until the end. Reinhild pictured the Iona community in the following words: "Spirituality isn't a superficial looking inside of yourself, but a search to make life fair/just and reasonable for everyone. It is essential to have courage and actively participate in church concerning economic and political developments, to be able to take your stand."

I was able to experience Reinhild's generosity, hospitality, and friendship multiple times in Zurich and in her house on Mallorca. She shared what she had: her apartment, her food, her ideas, and plans. The latter always being grand.

Due to her illness, she was not able to travel much in the last few years. Until the very end, she kept in contact, encouraged women and worked on her projects. She died suddenly in the night between the 28th and 29th October 2022 in her apartment in Zurich. Reinhild leaves two brothers, her son, two grandchildren and countless friends from all over the world.

Barbara Heyse-Schaefer, Pastor, Board member of EPIL and
National Coordinator of the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women in Austria

Translation: Agnes Kienesberger

You can read more in EFECW publication: Three generations – with energy and vision, p. 60-62 https://www.efecw.net/images/files/EFECW book12 INLAGA webb.pdf

EFECW NL, Closing meeting

26th October 2022, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

After many years of being a member country of EFECW we have to let you know that, sadly, we won't be able to continue our membership. During our closing meeting of 26th October, 2022 in Amsterdam we had to take the decision to discontinue EFECW NL.

In the Netherlands we have a long *herstory* with EFECW. In the beginning, the aegis of Dutch women's organisations called Ecumenical Women's Contact was a member of EFECW. This represented a broad variety of women from all Christian denominations including women of catholic religious congregations and convents as well as the women's desk of the Dutch Ecumenical Council of Churches. But more and more of these women's organisations and networks gradually had to close down - due to ageing, secularization, financial and other reasons. Some of us stayed as



individuals. We formed a group of less than ten women and some sponsoring friends. As a small group we met every year in one of our private homes. We distributed the European EFECW newsletter and we shared the reports of those who had participated in one of the EFECW conferences or meetings. Currently there are only 5 of us in the Dutch group, of whom 3 announced they have to leave at the end of this year, partly owing to our senior age (between 67 and 91 years). We just don't seem to be able to get young(er) women to continue.

We had different and longstanding commitments in the greater EFECW network: as Treasurer (Gisela Hoeve), Greet den Dulk and Liesbeth Wanhill as members of the Finance Committee for many years. Pia Tiemersma and Liesbeth Wanhill were the national coordinators; and Martina Heinrichs was Co President (2 periods) and European Representative to the International Committee of the Fellowship for the Least Coin (ICFLC). At several General Assemblies some of us gave workshops and presentations. We have been present at Neighbouring Country Conferences, National Coordinators' Meetings and General Assemblies.

In the 1990's the Netherlands formed one region together with the United Kingdom. As such, we organized in1993 a seminar at 'Kerk en Wereld' in Driebergen: "Women citizens in the New Europe" to name only one of many other — national or regional activities - together with the (already mentioned) Dutch overseeing organisation Ecumenical Women's Contact.

EFECW opened many doors for us to women in other European countries, especially to Eastern and Central Europe after 1989 when the Iron Curtain broke down. We learned about women and their faith communities in other contexts. We became aware of the wide spectrum of items, challenges and best practices of women in different all-day social and political situations which broadened our horizon. EFECW has given us strength, many friendships, and communication in various fields.

In order not to lose the connection between Christian women in the Netherlands and Europe (in both directions), we have asked a still existing and very active Dutch ecumenical women's network, the Dutch Ecumenical Women's Synod, to take over the EFECW membership. We hope to get their answer and decision before the end of this year.

Greet den Dulk, Martina Heinrichs, Haydy Nelson, Pia Tiemersma, Liesbeth Wanhill

Ecumenical and other news

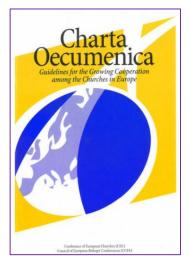
20 years of the Charta Oecumenica

What stories will women tell of women's experiences of ecumenical cooperation in these 20 years for the future?

Paragraph 8 says... As churches we intend to join forces in promoting the process of democratisation in Europe. We commit ourselves to work for structures of peace, based on the non-violent resolution of conflicts. We condemn any form of violence against the human person, particularly against women and children. ...

Women's experiences

During the EFECW General Assembly in August in Strasbourg a group of women shared experiences of spirituality, community, action and hopes for a living church in communion out of the Charta. A bouquet of rich experiences of moments of hope as well as lost hopes of continuities and sustainability was shared.



What is the Charta?

The <u>Charta Oecumenica</u> is guidelines for the growing cooperation among churches in Europe, published in April 2001 in Strasbourg by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Roman Catholic Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE). It should mark the beginning of the century, and it is a document of inspiration it was said. How has this century as far been developed? What does this mean in practice? What roles do the women have taken? What role does dialogue play at the local level?

The Charta is a working document, not doctrinal, meant to be a process in progress-a Emmaus pilgrimage. A document still valid, but how living is the pilgrimage? What can women tell among women about their

experiences if ecumenism?

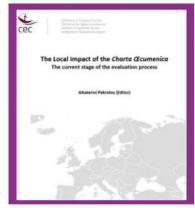
The Charta is translated into thirty languages. During 2017, CEC set up a questionnaire about the churches and organisations experiences. A variety of experiences was shared. Please read and find

your countries in "<u>The Local Impact</u> of the Charta Œcumenica: The current stage of the evaluation process".

Women's stories

The EFECW CC wants for the period 2022-2026 to hold the Charta alive, actual and work on sharing women's experiences.

Paragraph 8 ends ... We commit ourselves ... to strengthen the position and equal rights of women in all areas of life, and to foster partnership in church and society between women and men.



Carin Gardbring, EFECW Co-President

Steps towards more equal climate work at the UN Commission on the Status of Women

Climate Change, Environment, Disaster Risk Reduction. Gender Equality at the Centre of Solutions

The sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) took place from 14 to 25 March 2022. Due to the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, CSW66 took place in a hybrid format.

CSW is the largest UN General gathering after the General Assembly and the single largest international summit focusing on women's rights. For two weeks CSW met to negotiate conclusions on the theme. This year's theme for the meeting was Gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment in relation to climate change, the environment and disaster risk reduction. In open sessions, keynote speeches from UN member states and in negotiations, gender-related aspects of the environmental and climate crisis were highlighted, both in its effects and in measures for adjustment and adaptation.

Organisations from the Civil Society participated in official delegations and organised side events among the many churches and faith-based organisations participating: World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation and ACT-Alliance and many national churches.



Voices from the Civil Society find it positive that the final document states the importance of women's full and equal participation in achieving the climate goals. Women and girls in vulnerable countries are worst affected by climate change. We have a long journey to climate justice, but an important step is that the CSW has now established that climate and gender equality work belong together. But they also see opposition to fundamental rights and reluctance to attack root causes of the problems of inequality.

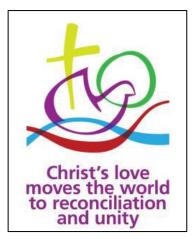
Please read more, https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw66-2022

CSW66 Agreed Conclusions (E/CN.6/2022/L.7)

Carin Gardbring, EFECW Co-President

Message of the World Council of Churches (WCC) 11th General Assembly

A Call to Act Together: "The Love of Christ urges us on." (2 Cor. 5:14, NRSV)-"Come, follow me!"



- 1. From the time he journeyed on earth, and even in this present moment, Jesus unceasingly addresses these words to every human being. Jesus' life, words, and actions are a constant invitation to movement from one physical place to another, from one group of people to another, from one mindset to another. Above all, amid the problems of the world, Jesus calls us to come to him and to abide in his love, a love which is offered for all the world (cf. Matt. 11:28).
- 2. The very last book of the Bible, Revelation, speaks of ancient forces of human suffering at work in the world: war, death, disease, and famine. As the assembly of the World Council of Churches gathered in Karlsruhe in 2022, we were conscious of their manifestations in the

world today. In their wake come injustice and discrimination, where those who have power often use it to oppress others rather than to build inclusion, justice, and peace.

- 3. Individuals, peoples, and countries also face catastrophes arising directly from an irresponsible and broken relationship with creation that has led to ecological injustice and climate crisis. As the climate emergency accelerates, so does the suffering experienced by impoverished and marginalized people.
- 4. Yet continuing our pilgrimage together as an assembly of the World Council of Churches, our mood has been one of anticipation and hope, and even joy, because through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ's invitation remains open to everyone, in fact to the whole of creation.
- 5. "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity." This love, in answer to the cries of those who are suffering, compels us to come to him in solidarity and to respond and act for justice. We are summoned to be reconciled in God's love, and to witness to that love revealed in Christ (1 John 4:9-11).
- 6. Reconciliation is a movement toward God and toward each other. It implies a readiness to listen to God and to one another. It is a conversion of the heart, from selfishness and apathy to inclusion and service, acknowledging our interdependence with creation. We confess that, even as we desire with our whole hearts to serve God and our neighbour, we have found ourselves failing, disagreeing, and sometimes walking in opposite directions. We confess that we need the transformative power of Christ's love to move to a world truly reconciled and united.
- 7. Christians, and the structures that we have built, have been complicit in the abuse of others, and we must repent and join in this movement of reconciliation. In the face of war, inequality, and sins against creation today, Christ's love calls us all to repentance, reconciliation, and justice.

Our journey together

8. Amid all our diversity, we have relearned in our assembly that there is a pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation, and unity to be undertaken together.

Meeting together in Germany, we learn the cost of war and the possibility of reconciliation;

Hearing the word of God together, we recognize our common calling;

Listening and talking together, we become closer neighbours;

Lamenting together, we open ourselves to each other's pain and suffering;

Working together, we consent to common action;

Celebrating together, we delight in each other's joys and hopes;

Praying together, we discover the richness of our traditions and the pain of our divisions.

"Go into the whole world"

- 9. From the time of his ascension into heaven, and even in this present moment, Christ unceasingly gives this command to all who follow him.
- 10. As reconciliation brings us closer to God and each other, it opens the way toward a unity founded in God's love. As Christians we are called to dwell in Christ's love and to be one (John 17). Such unity, which is a gift from God, and which arises from reconciliation and is grounded in his love, enables us to address the world's urgent problems. We will find a strength to act from a unity founded in Christ's love, for it enables us to learn the things that make for peace, to transform division into reconciliation, and to work for the healing of our living planet. Christ's love will sustain all of us in the task of embracing everyone and overcoming exclusion.
- 11. We have tasted the experience of such love as we gathered from 352 member churches with our ecumenical partners, friends from other faith communities, and from all regions of the world to seek unity amid our diversity. Together we have listened to voices often marginalized in the world: women, youth, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples.



Participants in the closing prayer service Photo: Paul Jeffrey/WCC

- 12. We long for a wider movement, the reconciliation and unity of all humanity, and indeed of the entire cosmos. This would be a unity in which God establishes justice, an equal place for all, through which creation may be renewed and strengthened. We rely on Christ's love as we act and advocate for climate justice. We join our voices with the Amsterdam assembly (1948) that "war is contrary to the will of God," and the Nairobi assembly (1975) that "racism is a sin against God." We lament that we have to repeat these statements.
- 13. In our assembly, we have used many words, but from these we have fashioned a new resolve. Now we ask God's assistance to transform our commitments into action. We commit ourselves to working with all people of good will. As we reflect on the fruits of our work in Karlsruhe, we invite all to become pilgrims together. For in Christ, all things will be made new. His love which is open to all, including the last, the least, and the lost, and is offered to all, can move and empower us in a pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation, and unity.

WCC Pre-Assembly Report - Just Community of Women and Men

29 and 30 August 2022, Karlsruhe, Germany

And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? (Luke 18:7) For wisdom opened the mouths of those who were mute... (Wisdom of Solomon 10:21)

From the time of the first assembly in Amsterdam in 1948, the World Council of Churches (WCC) has worked in multiple ways to foster a just community of women and men, in church and society. This process continued as Christians gathered August 29-30, 2022, for the Just Community of Women and Men (JCWM) pre-assembly to the WCC's 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany. Through bible study, liturgy, workshops and presentations participants explored the assembly's theme through the lens of gender justice, identifying avenues for reconciliation and collaboration.

Biblical-theological reflection during the pre-assembly focused on Acts 8:26-39, the encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. This story challenged us to reflect on our understanding of inclusion and transformation, and how injustice occurs on the basis of identity and particularity, including sexual and gender identity, class, ethnic, and racial identity, and religious identity. We asked: what prevents us from experiencing the fullness of life in God? What maintains exclusion and prevents radical welcome?

Our study and discussion also drew on key documents reflecting JCWM work since the 10th Assembly in Busan, and documents coming to the 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe. These included Gender Justice Principles, the Code of Conduct, strategies developed during the consultation for the 20th Anniversary of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace women's team visits, and the PJP Orthodox Women's Meeting. In all of these, we reflected the pilgrimage movement of celebrating gifts, visiting wounds and transforming injustice. While we recognize and celebrate this history of work for transformation toward inclusive participation and gender justice, we are still advocating for essential changes to be made. From our discussions in the pre-assembly, we lift up four areas calling for continued urgent attention.

1. Violence and abuse:

Reports from every region and programme focus revealed that multiple forms of sexual and gender-based violence and abuse are represented in all regions and have devastating impacts on those on the margins, most vulnerable to mega-trends such as the COVID pandemic, the climate crisis, conflict and war, racism, migration, and the role of media in shaping experience including violence. We recognize with concern the emerging forms of violence against women and children in online spaces, exacerbated by the impunity accorded social media.

We noted the intersectionality among these issues and in relation to gender injustice. A vivid example is the particular experience of widows, single mothers, and others made vulnerable to poverty and abuse by isolation in the community. These highlight the economic and ecological crises and their effects on women, with threats to employment, food security and health care exacerbated by the pandemic.

Sadly, almost a quarter century since the Harare assembly declared that violence against women is a sin, we continue to hear the stories of sexual and gender-based violence in our churches as well as in society. We trace its effects throughout our communities: against women and children, often as a weapon of war; against the LGBTQIAA+ community; against refugee, migrant and trafficked women, against indigenous and minority women and girls; often overlapping with racism, xenophobia, and selective inclusion. We are reminded of the harmful theological doctrines and

biblical interpretations that help to perpetuate structural and systemic violence. We acknowledge the continuing culture of silence around the presence of violence within our churches, and abuse by clergy in particular.

These stories of sexual and gender-based violence in all its forms were powerfully portrayed in the Waterfall Tapestry of patches from around the world, and in the witness of Thursdays in Black Ambassadors and Trailblazers, but so too were stories of courage, resilience and resistance as we celebrated networks engaged in solidarity, advocacy, and action.

2. Praxis (Policy and Practice):

Our discussions named barriers to equity and equality related to tradition, culture, and politics which plague our theologies and praxis of faith. Harmful cultural norms and Christian fundamentalism often join to threaten women's rights, at times with violence, pushing women and men into regressive and oppositional gender roles. Sociocultural realities that impose themselves on our religious lives distort God's vision of life in fullness, abundance, and love. Patriarchy hurts and exploits women, men, and people of all genders. The operation of patriarchy or the power imbalances between women and men results in an inclusion that comes with conditions set by those in power. As Christians, we are called to employ the "power of love" and not the "love of power".

At times in our Christian communities, oppressive theology is used to justify discrimination on the basis of gender or sex. Even when theological education and entry into ministry have been accepted, barriers exist that prevent women from serving to their fullest potential. We lament limited mentoring, training, and resources to cultivate a new generation of women leaders and peacemakers in our communities.

It is imperative that men confront their own positions on gender justice. We must urgently and intentionally work with men and boys for transformative and positive masculinities, to name and resist the sin of patriarchy, and emphasize what it means to be truly an equal and just community of women and men.

There is immense potential to bridge these gaps and ensure that our devotional life, social action, theological work, and theoretical research reflect equity and equality not only in words but in funding, action and impact. While we shared anger and despair at the places in our churches where women's rights and participation seem to be regressing, we also learned of work within the WCC and member churches that is contributing to agency and empowerment.

3. Rights and Responsibilities

Gender justice must be mainstreamed in all policies, language, programmes, structures, and institutions of our churches and communities, with attention to implementation and accountability. It is vital to allocate appropriate resources for women's empowerment; which must include gender-responsive budgeting. We ask again for our churches and the wider ecumenical fellowship to be proactive and prophetic in discerning the signs of the times in relation to gender justice.

While acknowledging that there is not a consensus, a significant number identified and challenged the current gender binary framing of the JCWM. Change could begin with the transformation of language to respect persons of non-binary and non-gender-conforming community. The need for safe spaces in faith communities was identified in several dimensions: for women in all churches, for vulnerable men, for creating dialogue and affirmation around gender diversity, and for solidarity and accompaniment with victims of violence.

4. Affirmation with Respect:

The vocation of the Church is to be: foretaste of new creation; prophetic sign to the whole world of the life God intends for all; good news of justice, peace and love. We celebrate and learn from positive examples and best practices of theology, action and advocacy towards transforming injustice.

We cannot see visible unity and reconciliation as long as women are still suffering. The community of God is not served by a so-called unity that dilutes, dismisses, or negates the lived experience of women. The prioritization of unity must not prevent us from delving deeper and exploring the real issues that hurt women and men. We seek a fellowship through the WCC that reflects Jesus' advocacy for women, and his model of a community where all are included and honoured with dignity and respect.

In the life of the WCC, we denounce, a neo-colonial approach that disrespects and exploits local and indigenous contexts. We continue to encourage churches to make use of the rich resources that the WCC has published over many years, and that reflects the call of the fellowship of churches to progress to gender justice.

Calls to Action: Our Vision for our Ecumenical Future

Being "disturbed" and moved by the Holy Spirit, we call on the WCC, its member churches, and ecumenical partners to:

- 1. implement the commitments already demonstrated by our churches through targeted and concrete actions;
- 2. create space for feminist and womanist dialogue among church leaders, pastors, and male clergy and for men to critically engage with their own positionalities, power, and privilege;
- 3. nurture and mentor intergenerational women's networks, encouraging women's potentials and leadership, especially those of young women;
- 4. allocate funding for gender justice and employ gender-responsive budgeting in the structures and institutions of our churches and communities;
- 5. appoint and recognize male allies and champions for gender equality;
- 6. sustain and amplify the Thursdays in Black campaign, Gender Justice Principles, Code of Conduct, DCSW strategies and other WCC and member church initiatives;
- 7. transform language to respect persons of the non-binary and non-gender conforming community;
- 8. advocate for nonviolent conflict prevention, resolution, and transformation, as well as the healing of personal and collective trauma;
- 9. integrate global, regional, and local programs and networks, such as the SDG Framework, CEDAW, and other UN instruments, for more effective communication and collaboration;
- 10. address the intersectional dimensions of gender justice including racial justice and reparations; economic exploitation and oppression; militarization and political violence; the vulnerability and exclusion of marginalized groups in our societies;

Without joint and just participation within church life, we cannot speak about humanity, Imago Dei, and the experience of the fullness of life bestowed upon us by Jesus Christ. The church is the body of Christ, and Christ is fully human. Gender justice is an issue of our authentic identity as Christian churches.



Please support:

The **Ruth-Epting Fund** (<u>www.efecw.net</u>) - which is essential for supporting financially the participation of women in EFECW events! and **The Fellowship of the Least Coin** (http://www.flc.net.ph)

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