



ECUMENICAL FORUM OF EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN WOMEN  
FORUM OECUMENIQUE DE FEMMES CHRETIENNES D'EUROPE  
ÖKUMENISCHES FORUM CHRISTLICHER FRAUEN IN EUROPA

# Newsletter

Spring 2023



Gracious God, loving Saviour

How can we thank you enough for guiding and protecting us with your goodness?

Thank you for every day and all people in it

Thank you for our meetings and our dreams

Stay with us, God, with your light when darkness is around us

Be our protection from sin and suffering,

And allow us to see Your blessed light

With which you illuminate us from heaven.

Amen

*Marijana Ajzenkol, EFECW Co-President*

## EFECW Coordinating Committee meeting

20<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> April 2023, Oradea, Romania

The Coordinating Committee (CC) of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women (EFECW) met in Oradea, Romania, and Marianna Apresyan joining us online.



We were welcomed to Oradea, by CC member Pastor Judit Vincze and stayed within the Roman Catholic Bishop's Episcopal Palace. We enjoyed the experience of a city like Oradea, where different traditions and expressions of faith come together and live in harmony.



We were very pleased to be able to meet with, Böcskei László, Roman Catholic Bishop, Virgil Bercea, Greek Catholic Bishop, Mátyás Attila, representative of the Lutheran Bishop, and Pálffy Annamária, Unitarian Pastor, representative of the Unitarian Bishop. We joined with members of "Care for Soul", Ecumenical Women's Prayer Chain. This is organised under the Romanian EFECW umbrella in partnership with Roman Catholic Diocese. We were invited to celebrate morning prayer in the Bishop's Chapel. Bishop Virgil Bercea invited us to an evening concert at the Greek Catholic Cathedral followed by dinner.

We continue to meet within the context of challenging times. We are mindful of our sisters in Ukraine suffering over one year of war. We are mindful of the mistrust and unrest throughout Europe, the ever-present climate crisis and further environmental degradation.



A key text for our meeting was Luke 10:38-42. Especially the words of Jesus to Martha, “*you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one*”. The EFECW is a place where women come together to share our common concerns. Our work in the CC is to enable our Forum sisterhood to grow stronger in witnessing Christ’s love, peace and justice within our churches and the world.

The EFECW General Assembly, held in 2022, established areas for work from 2022-2026. The CC focused on the next stages in the development of an action plan, i.e. defining the kind of activity that will help EFECW to engage in reflection and action together on the predefined thematic areas while taking into account the resources and gifts available of our members in the CC and in the organisation at large. Some of the coming activities will include a young women’s project with podcasts (organised and managed by our younger CC members and GA 2022 interns 😊), a celebratory publication for the Jacqueline Stuyt Legacy Fund, neighbourhood meetings, etc. We were also mindful of project opportunities that could develop over the coming years.

We looked ahead to October 2023 when we will be joining with Women in Dialogue for Peace for the Reinhild Traitler Symposium, meeting in Vienna.



EFECW Coordinating Committee

## Romanian Ecumenical Forum of Women

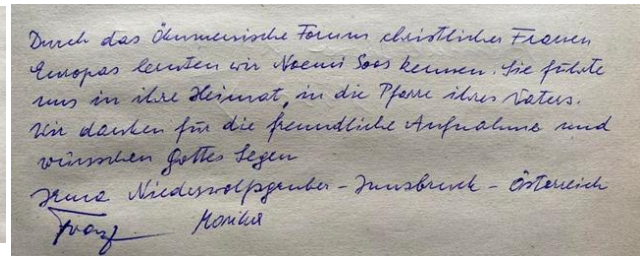
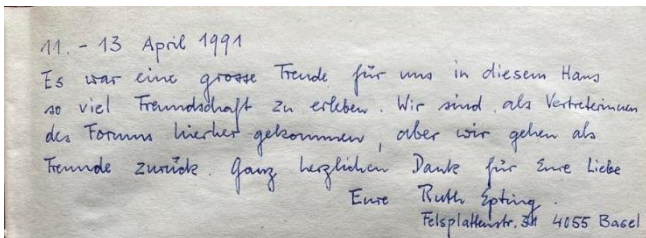


Our city on the border can also be called a “door” from the perspective of the Forum, because, except for the Transylvanian Saxon community, this is where this Christian women’s movement of great value arrived to us.

Nagyvárad, but specifically the Nagyvárad-Csillagváros Reformed Church, is the workplace of the ecumenical women’s movement. The founding pastor of the congregation, the late István Szebeni, served here back in 1991.

His daughter, also a pastor, Noémi Soós, attended the annual gathering of the Christian Women’s World Day of Prayer in York, England, in 1990, as a member of a delegation of five people. There she had the chance to meet the former board of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women, who were also present as guests.

I present two photos below, both of which show the result of this personal acquaintance, which has now become official and nationwide.



As a result of the enthusiasm of Noémi Soós for this project, the organization of the Forum in Romania soon took its start.

In March 1991, a meeting was held that was attended by people of different denominations and nations. At this meeting, they decided to establish the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women. They followed through on this decision and officially registered the organization in 1995.

The ecumenical community included the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Unitarian, and unofficially, the Baptist and occasionally, the Pentecostal women’s community. Initially, they created regions with regional coordinators, and the functioning was ensured by the general assembly, the board of directors, and the membership.

The activity weakened during the years 2014-2020, even though they had started and followed through with many activities before that. For example, they held self-awareness trainings, women’s church weeks, disciple trainings, and expect for the Saxon Lutheran Church, they also coordinated the organization of World Prayer Days nationwide.

The main goal is to maintain inter-denominational relations, organize joint diaconal activities, promote spiritual renewal, emphasize environmental protection, as it is also part of God's creation plan. Furthermore, the aim is to promote faith in God based on the Bible, and to promote cooperation between denominations for the sake of peace.

Why is the Forum's activity important in Romania?

The reason is that this is a very diverse country in terms of nationality, language, religion and culture. For example, there are many mixed marriages, and the Forum is precisely designed to fulfil the role of founding, peace-building, and spiritual leadership in addressing this issue.



In this community, it is important for everyone to preserve their own denomination, religious practices, and commitment to God within the denominational community to which they belong. However, it is also important that we step outside of our own boundaries once or more times a year and express our faith in God in this way as well, develop our faith, practice goodness towards others, including Lutherans, Calvinists, Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Orthodox, Unitarians and Messianic Jews.

If the non-Christian part of the world looks at us and examines our way of life, what do they see?

Because the essence always lies in practicing what has been learned in theory.

Am I living according to what God's Word teaches me or not? Does my faith in God inspire me or not?

Practicing inter-denominationalism, getting to know and accepting each other better helps us move towards a renewed way of life.

Ecumenism is important because there are a lot of inter-denominational families around us and at least half of the believers we work with live in inter-denominational families. This also prompts us to open up to others. Because we can only receive and accept those we know. This will be successful only if we do it with God. Because Jesus did not send out his disciples to build bulkheads, but to break them down and find the one true path, the common discovery of Christ!



Since 2020, the national leadership of the Forum has been renewed. There is a Reformed president and a co-presidency consisting of a Lutheran, a Saxon Evangelical, a Greek Catholic, a Roman Catholic, a Unitarian, and an Orthodox representative. There is also a Roman Catholic secretary. The organizational structure had to be fundamentally changed. The new leadership sees the opportunity for renewal in inviting the women's association presidents from each denomination to serve as co-presidents. They are the ones who know their own women best,

many of whom come from mixed-denomination families, and can motivate them to participate in the activities of the Forum.

The Forum closely collaborates with the World Day of Prayer Committee, and together we organize the World Day of Prayer.



In summary, we are at the begging of a renewal process. The organization is in place, the responsible individuals are in place, and we have started reaching out to church communities, universities and even young people to introduce them to the Forum's activities. After all, in today's world, every event urges individuals with good intentions to work towards peace, which can only be achieved through a shared set of values.

Programs of the Forum are: Ecumenical evening prayer, Let raise the flag of the Forum (we are visiting young communities, universities, World Day of Prayer, Make up for soul – ecumenical prayer chain, pastoral care trainings and other unique occasions.

To God be the glory, for He shows us the way of our growing faith and opens our hearts and minds towards others as well.



*Judit Vinczéné Pálfi,*

*Reformed Pastor*

*President of EFCW-Romania*

*Member of EFECW Coordinating Committee*

## Online National Coordinators' Prayer-Meeting, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2023

### Woman and the Good News, "Go to my brothers and tell them" John 20:17

Bible reading, John 20:1-17. Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. Why did the angels appear to Mary and not to Peter and John?

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."' "



### Discussion Questions:

Why did the angels appear to Mary and not to Peter and John?

Who was Mary for Jesus?

Why does Jesus appear to Mary?

What does Jesus give us all by appearing to Mary?

What is the message for us?

### Prayer

God greets us with joy and says “rest in my hands here for a while”

*Our Father (ALL)*

God brings out water to wash our feet

God prepares a meal to nourish our weary spirits

So let us receive the gracious hospitality of our God

For hospitality and reconciliation in our churches and societies, for peace in the world,

*Hear us, o God*

For refugees, displaced families and homeless people

*Hear us, o God*

For all sisters of ours that are suffering

*Hear us, o God*

For the care of the earth, that all mutual dependence of all species upon one another might be honoured and protected

*Hear us, o God*

For our Forum, ourselves and for each person of faith, that might let go of all that is false within us and grow in our sisterhood as disciples of the way

*Hear us, o God*

May we feel the presence of our Saviour walking near us, and know the power of the Spirit in our actions and our words. May the presence of God be with us and give us peace





## Greek EFECW Conference on domestic violence and violence against women

19-20 March 2023, Athens, Greece

I had the great honour to attend a conference on domestic abuse and violence against women in Athens, Greece on 19-20 March 2023. The conference was organised by the Greek National Forum of the EFECW, the City of Athens, and the Greek Ministry of Education. Furthermore, the Orthodox Church of Greece, the Catholic Archdiocese of Athens, and the Evangelical Church of Greece were involved in the organization. On 19 March, the opening of the conference took place at the Athens City Hall, where I was able to listen to various speakers that included the Mayor of Athens, the Minister of Education and Religion, as well as a UN expert and Professor of Criminology at the Panteion University of Athens.



*Members of the Greek Forum with the Minister of Education and Religion and the Mayor of Athens at the opening ceremony in the town hall of Athens*

The following day, I was actively involved myself. Together with Maria Lyraki from the Greek Forum, I led a workshop on the first-hand experience of domestic abuse. The participants, students between the ages of 15 and 18 from different schools in Athens, put themselves in the different positions of the abused woman, the abuser, and outsiders such as police officers, family members, friends, neighbours and colleagues, church leaders, and psychologists, from whose perspectives they had to take position and formulate feelings and thoughts. This was achieved through various exercises and role plays. In addition, we presented global and national statistical data, the seven forms of abuse, the cycle of abuse, and three videos on coercive control, the situation in Greece and the support services that are available, as well as on consent. Finally, we created a 'river of abuse' with 'walking stones' on it, which should serve to avoid and deal with abuse instead of slipping into the abuse. In addition to our workshop, there were five other workshops, which were held by the police department in Athens and a working group on domestic abuse run by the catholic church,

among others. The workshops all took place in two rounds of 90 minutes each and the total number of participants attained almost 200 students.



*Workshop at the Cultural Centre of Athens*



*Organizational Team*



*'River of abuse'*

After a break, the conference continued with various contributions by different speakers, including the problem of abuse for mentally and/or physically disabled people, the influences on the development of children, and the impact on the brain. Finally, there was a round table discussion, in which Angela Sestrini as the moderator, Georgia Bouri, head of the department of equality and anti-discrimination policies in Athens as well as psychologist, the metropolitan of the orthodox church, the catholic archbishop of Athens, the Greek orthodox archimandrite, the president of the synod of the evangelical church in Greece, and I took part. I held a very personal speech in this context with insights into how anyone can experience domestic abuse at any time, how it happens, a better understanding of such experiences, and my ideas and demands for concrete actions, changes, and solutions. The result of the evening was that the four religious representatives now want to cooperate at national level in Greece for a broad training of church workers as priests on the subject of domestic abuse and their reactions in dealing with affected people.



*Round table discussion*

On March 21, I then had the opportunity to talk about the subject in various classes at a high school, which was particularly enriching for me. The interest, perspectives, approaches, and questions of the students were very fruitful and insightful. I hope that the exchange has a long-term impact for the students on an individual level.



*School visit*

Overall, my stay in Athens was a success. The topic is one that is very close to my heart and to which I will continue to be committed. For me, the importance of attending the conference was on an additional personal level. My last stay in Greece was as a steward at the 2014 General Assembly in Tinos. This marked my first encounter with the EFECW. Now, almost nine years later, I returned as a member of the Coordinating Committee. So, this opportunity was a very special honor for me, for which I am grateful from the bottom of my heart.

*Hannah Wehner, EFECW Coordinating Committee member*

## We remember our sisters

### Astrid-Johanna (Evelyne's Zinsstag, EFECW Ex-CC member, daughter)



Astrid Johanna died unexpectedly in the night between 27 and 28 January 2023. She was 17 months old, a friendly girl who loved being around people and was eager to take hold of everything that surrounded her. She was born with congenital heart disease and received corrective surgery just one year before. The exact cause of her death is still unclear. We are very sad to have to let go of her so suddenly. And yet we are also grateful for the time that she was with us, for all the people that she was able to meet, and for the quality of life that the surgery made possible for her. We entrust her into God's loving hands where we believe that we too will once be held eternally.

Evelyne, Cedric and Tristan



“Dear sisters: Two angels are now flying in heaven; how good that they both met, along with so many women in Strasbourg last summer. Astrid passed away on 28 January. With much love from Basel. Evelyne” (shared with EFECW National Coordinators at the announcement of Roswitha’s death)

*Astrid accompanied her mother at the General Assembly in Strasbourg (August 2022), present during our discussions and prayers, inspiring us with her gentle and loving nature ❤️*

**Rev. Dr. Roswitha Golder, 27.10.1938-26.02.2023**



We are ever so sad to announce the passing of our beloved mother, grandmother and great-grandmother.

Roswitha enjoyed her life self-determined and active until the very end. She passed away unexpectedly and quickly at home on Sunday.

We have a lot to say.

And yet we are speechless.

How can we say goodbye to you forever?

Above all we want to say thank you.

Thank you for all the years we spent with you.

Thank you for every moment we shared with you.

Thank you for all the adventures and for all the trips.

Thank you for being there, through all the lows and during all the highs.

Thank you for all the conversations; for your quick wit, for discussing and for philosophizing. Thank you for listening.

Thank you for loving us just the way we are and making us the people we are today.

We miss you dearly and we will miss you throughout all of our lives.

We carry you with us everywhere we go, no matter what we do, you are a part of us and in our hearts you live on.

We love you

*National Coordinators messages...*

Danke fuer die Nachricht!

Ich freue mich, die Gelegenheit gehabt zu haben, Schwester Roswitha kennenzulernen.

Schon bei diesen kurzen Gelenheiten wurde sie zu einem Vorbild einer starken, im Glauben verankerten Dienerin Christi.

Danke, lieber Herr, dass es sie gegeben hat! 🌹

Auf ein frohes Wiedersehen, liebe Roswitha 🌹❤️

Ana Slacanac, NC Kroatien

We are still in shock at the sad news of Roswitha's passing...

Teacher and sister in Gospel and Ecumenism.

She leaves us her prophetic strength and her closeness as a legacy, as an encouragement.

We thank God for having shared so much with her and we join her community and her family in her prayers.

She already rests in the loving bosom of God.

Nous t'aimons. Toujours.

Pilar Yuste, España

It is with great sadness that we receive the news of the passing of our sister in Christ, Roswitha Golder.

May she rest in God's arms and may eternal light shine for her. May her loved ones feel God's kind and blessing hand over them even in this difficult time.

Condolences

Mira Poloprutka, Czech Republic



*Photo: EFECW, Neighbourhood meeting, Cret Berard, Switzerland, April 2017*

Dears, I am deeply saddened to announce the death of our dear Roswitha who a backbone of our Forum. We already miss her... The Risen One has welcomed Roswitha, who gave so much for others, into his light and his endless love...

Anne-Marie Schott

On Sunday, February 26, Roswitha Golder, Swiss ecumenist, feminist and pastor to Latin American migrants, transitioned to glory. Roswitha was diminutive in stature, but a giant in defending the rights of the marginalized, particularly migrants. Former director of Witnessing Together, a Swiss-based ministry to migrants, Roswitha specialized in prison ministry and was a firm believer in leading by example, extending pastoral support to the Methodist ministry to Latina migrants in Geneva despite being a Lutheran pastor. Roswitha was always offering a smile and words of encouragement to those in her sphere of influence. She supported the work of the Just community of Women and Men of the World Council of Churches (WCC), and of the Fellowship of the Least Coin (FLC) as well. Journey on in joy and peace, dear sister and friend Roswitha, and many thanks for your life and witness!

ICFLC

Dear Evelyne, Thanks for sharing the sad news of the passing away from ASTRID who was so lovely and vivid in Strasbourg.

With our sister ROSWITHA: two nice flowers in God's heavenly garden.

Haydy and Martina - EFECW/NL

## 1 year of war in Ukraine, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2023

Dear Sisters,

It is the 28<sup>th</sup> of the month and on this day we remember Ukraine - we have already shared prayers this weekend - and our prayers need to continue. Here is one of the prayers from our daily prayer.

God of power and promise,

You gather and scatter your people to the ends of the earth.

Gather me together now with my sisters in the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women.

Today is the 28<sup>th</sup> day of the month where we think especially of our sisters in Ukraine.

Loving God,

as Lydia welcomed the Gospel,

Tabitha offered her skills,

and Rhoda held fast to the truth,

We pray that we too may be filled with your Spirit.

And be ready always, in word and deed, to pursue peace and justice within our nations, communities and homes. AMEN

*Love and peace Anthea, 28 February – Prayer Cycle – Remembering Ukraine*



Thank you Anthea and all sisters in prayer!!!

Today is the 1st day of spring and the winter passed in which all the Ukrainians survived mostly in darkness and cold homes while with a strong hope and belief in God's blessing and guidance to victory. We need your support and prayers so much, feeling this sharing of the Ukrainian values with us and thankful for the tireless Forum's prayers which show us the light in the darkness.

God bless you all, sisters. Slava Ukraini! Geroyam Slava!

*With love and hope,*

*Ulyana*

Sunday February 26, 2023. Today in my local congregation we prayed for Ukraine, the people and for an end to war and a just peace.

Triune God, we come to you in prayer. You who are the creator, deliverer and liberator of all life. You who have the power to do wonders. We pray for all those suffering during the horrific war in Ukraine. We pray for an end to war and just peace.

Have mercy on all who mourn, all who have lost everything.

We pray for our own country. For people who are on the run here. Help us be welcoming and do what we can.

Heavenly Father, help us, all your children, from all corners of the earth, to live together in community, peace, love, and respect.

Jesus Christ, you who are the light and hope of the whole world. Show us your way. Help us walk it, follow you to people and places where we are needed most. Help us embody your love, show trust, and convey hope.

Holy Spirit, come to the leaders of the world, to us all, be enlightened with your wisdom. Show us your way.

We pray so, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The board of the Christian Council of Sweden met on February 24 for an ordinary meeting on the day of one year of war. The board formulated this prayer and encouraged the churches in Sweden to pray it today.

*Best wishes in Christ,*

*Carin Gardbring, EFECW Co-president*

Thank you Carin!

We will apply this prayer as well to our regular still time for peace and common sense to be given the responsible ones.

Today one of the Ukrainian refugee pupil, where I was a class teacher, left school to return to Dnipro because he misses his father so long and doesn't care about danger anymore.

And it's been difficult to endure for so long without having an own place to stay.



I blessed him and his mother so praying 🙏 is not to become tired of!



Blessings to all sisters ❤️

From the Croatian forum.

*Ana Slacanac*

Thank you very much Carin and all the sisters for remembering and supporting us!!

*Love from Lviv 😊,*

*Natalia & others*



## Ecumenical and other news

### International Women's Day, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2023

#### UN Women Executive Director's message

Women and girls have just as much right to access the digital world and prosper in it as men and boys. Their creativity, knowledge and perspectives can shape a future where technology contributes to transforming social norms, amplifying women's voices, pushing forward against online harassment, preventing the perpetuation of algorithmic biases, and distributing the benefits of digitalization as the great equalizer to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

All over the world, women's and girls' movements are defiant and steadfast in the face of regressive gender norms and pushback against their rights. Activists are raising their powerful voices for inclusion, and an end to violence and to discrimination in education, the workplace and in legislation. On International Women's Day we honour and celebrate them, adding our committed support to their energy and drive.

Goal 5 is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda. It is the powerful multiplier, the smart investment and the prerequisite to get the Sustainable Development Goals as a whole back on track. Technology and innovation are game changers in this. The advantages brought by meaningful connectivity and equal access to digital skills and services are particularly important for low- and middle-income countries – where most of the world's population growth will be - and for the women and girls in those countries, most of all older women, migrants, women living in rural areas and those with disabilities. These are the same women for whom the gaps in access and illiteracy in digital skills are the most acute. We must not let them face a new kind of discrimination and enter a new kind of poverty.

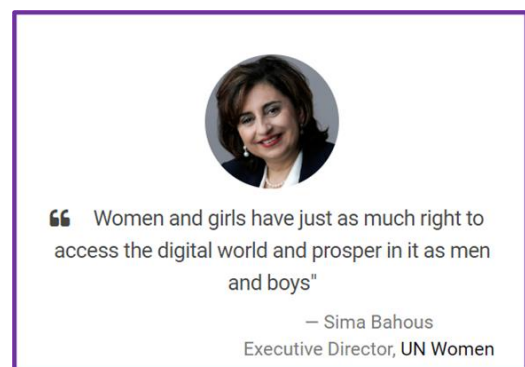
By current estimates, just under half (53.6 per cent) of the global population is online, but the share of that access and its benefits is unequal. Last year there were 259 million more men than women using the Internet—and it was not a safe space. We have both to end the gaps and detoxify the online world for those entering it. With the right decisions by government and industry and the collaborative efforts of civil society, closing the gender digital divide could become the fast lane to progress as technology accelerates.

This will also take a sharp rise in accountability for technology outcomes and a strong and effective approach to online violence, including safeguards and expanded legal frameworks to address unregulated behaviours and standards in ICTs. And it will take determined measures to provide the necessary skills and learning, especially in the STEM subjects, that will pave the way to the leadership of women and girls as technology creators, promoters and decision-makers.

Our vision of equality, of what our world could be, for all of us, can and will include the equal enjoyment of the fruits of technology and innovation without fear of violence or abuse of any sort. Women and girls must be able to engage, create, learn and work, safely and productively either online or offline, making the most of all the opportunities in every sphere of life and at every stage of it, in education, in the economy, in society and in politics.

I wish you all a very happy International Women's Day.

*Sima Bahous*



## Webinar on Algorithms, the Digital Divide, and Polarization; Impact on Gender Justice

The 67th UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), focusing on gender equality, technology, and innovation, has concluded. After over 85 hours of negotiations, member states reached the so-called Agreed Conclusions, and decided on new normative language on gender equality. It took place on March 6-17 in New York City and online.



It is so obvious, yet so sensitive to patriarchal power structures. Women and girls are 27 times more likely than men and boys to be subjected to harassment and hate online and in social media, which is totally unacceptable. Therefore, it is encouraging that the UN Women's Commission has such a focus on these issues during this year's meeting. Sharper legislation and better regulations are needed, as well as various measures to make the tech sector much more equal.

As technology and innovation have a major impact on the empowerment and rights of women and girls, it is extremely important that women and girls are seen as agents of change who must be involved in all steps, as creators, innovators, developers, and users. It is also important to address the negative aspects that technological development brings with it. For example, we have seen with concern how private information from digital platforms has been used to control the reproductive rights of women and girls and how women and girls are exposed to violence, persecution, and hatred. The digital space must be protected and be a safe and secure place for everyone.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) and other ecumenical organisations and churches were involved in several online side events among them a Webinar on Algorithms, the Digital Divide, and Polarization; Impact on Gender Justice on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2023

Facts: What is AI?

Artificial intelligence is the ability of computer programs and robots to mimic the natural intelligence of humans and other animals.

A bot is a computer program that can automatically perform operations and a chatbot uses AI to hold conversations with humans.

*What do the technology do to us as individuals, as women and men and as churches. In the seminar many voices participated from different experiences of society, universities, and churches.*

The discussion was moderated by Dr Erin Green, a researcher and teacher who spent nearly 15 years studying the social and ecological impact of artificial intelligence. “Of course, the great blessing of ecumenical fellowship and movements is that we are able to bring together so many different perspectives on any given topic,” she said.

Dr Antje Jackelén, former archbishop and primate of the Church of Sweden, and prior to that the bishop of the diocese of Lund, termed polarization “one of the curses of our time”. It was one of what she calls “the toxic Ps” of our time: polarization, populism, protectionism, post-truth, and patriarchy.

Yet amid the toxic digital soup in which we all seem to be swimming, Jackelén, noted some positive aspects of what algorithms could possibly do. “Now, the good news is that digitization holds the potential of providing a means to overcome the disastrous synergy of that toxic cocktail,” she said. “A small example: AI-powered gender decoders help employers write job postings that are more inclusive and thus increase the diversity of their workforces. That’s the good news.”

As speakers weighed in from the local contexts, many of them agreed that overcoming harmful biases online begins with overcoming them in person.

In summarizing the conversation, Dr Green highlighted the recurring points of “scrutinizing power” and cultivating community. “We can’t take this all on ourselves. It is important as the AI discourse gains traction that in the church, we make connections and that we draw strength in numbers so that we see this not as an individual project, but the work of the church itself.”

As Dr Jackelén emphasised, “This is indeed time for joint transdisciplinary reflection on how AI develops and will affect people’s lives, societies around the world, and the planet as such.”

Concluding the webinar, Amanda Strydom, senior programme manager for Code for Africa's CivicSignal, a programme that uses machine learning tools to monitor the way media reports on topics of interest, concluded the webinar by offering an array of practical tools to help people prevent gender-based abuse and other forms of harassment online.

- Having a plan for when harassment occurs is important “Is everyone going to have a standard response that they’re going to give, possibly, or is there an idea of shutting down and not responding to trolls? Really having that plan in place means you can physically prepare for it as well as mentally prepare yourself and the support network you have with you.
- ” She cited a survey in which more than 60 percent of advocates or journalists indicated that they are a target of gender-based harassment. “It means that your personal protection needs to be so much stronger,” she suggested. “One example—and quite an obvious one—is setting up two-factor authentication on all our accounts.”
- “We’ve heard over and over today the importance of community and forging connections, and you can see among us hear the connections we are making.”

Watch the session: <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/algorithms-harmful-or-helpful-faith-based-groups-can-work-to-decrease-the-digital-divide>

*Carin Gardbring, EFECW Co-President*

## Working Multi-Religiously for Gender Equality: Reassessing the Role of Education of knowledge in the Digital Age

A hybrid seminar on Working Multi-Religiously for Gender Equality: Reassessing the Role of Education of knowledge in the Digital Age on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2023

Religions for Peace organised a hybrid parallel side event in collaboration with other international organisations on March 14. Working Multi-Religiously for Gender Equality: Reassessing the Role of Education of knowledge in the Digital Age. It brought together leaders and experts from different sectors of society, religions, and regions, who discussed how knowledge and education from different perspectives and traditions can contribute to gender justice in the digital age and give strength to women as leaders.

The seminar on March 9 ended with the that “We’ve heard over and over today the importance of community and forging connections, and you can see among us hear the connections we are making.”



This hybrid seminar was opened with the focus on the continued pandemic of violence against women and girls. The technology has opened opportunities for women and girls but at the same time it has provoked gender-based violence in a way we never have experienced before. It was emphasised that education had be changed to include the new age of digitalisation.

Dr Azza Karam the Secretary General of Religions for Peace concluded with the same “Nothing compares to, or beats the ability to work collaboratively, to pool resources together”. The importance community was emphasised for the religious communities to work on. The technology is a tool. “It is crucial that religious actors who stand up for human rights get involved in UN processes. We must continue to mobilise together to reclaim the religious narrative and counter the backlash against equality.” As Dr Jackelén emphasised, who also participated in the hybrid seminar.

Please read more: <https://www.rfp.org/religions-for-peace-and-partners-hosted-working-multi-religiously-for-gender-equality-reassessing-the-role-of-education-and-knowledge-in-the-digital-age-during-csw67/>

*Carin Gardbring, EFECW Co-president*

## Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Nadine Bitar

*“She is clothed with strength and dignity,  
and she laughs without fear of the future.”*

*Proverbs 31:25*

While we celebrate International Women’s Day with the world, we also encourage the world to explore the importance of women in God’s salvation plan. One of the most remarkable elements we have in our biblical text is the strong female figures who have been among the main characters in God’s journey with humans. Even though many would think of men first when it comes to these strong figures, we must also know that there are several Godly women in the Bible who were and still are a source of inspiration, not only because of how they lived but also because of their unshakable faith. Those women showed us that they were worthy of God’s trust even in some of the toughest circumstances.

### Be courageous like Esther!

Being a woman in our world now and especially a Middle Eastern woman from the Holy Land, we are expected to be an “Esther”. A strong, faithful and courageous woman who had seen the pain and suffering of her people; and had agreed to put her life at risk in order to save her people. Do not let anyone underestimate your powers; speak up against injustice and trust that the Lord will always be on your side. In a world filled with personal benefits, be an Esther and stand up for God’s truth and set the example of how a woman could serve and be a source of hope.

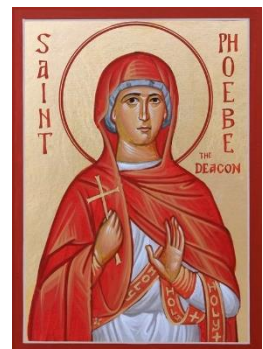


### Be equal to a man like Priscilla!

In a world filled with men supremacy, be a “Priscilla”. The book of Acts tells us of this outstanding woman who was seen as equal to her husband Aquila. In fact, Priscilla was mentioned not only in the Book of Acts, but also in three of Paul’s letters. Be filled with the Spirit and influence the people around you. Be a Priscilla who was always there alongside her husband to teach and live out the Word of God. Have no fear when expressing your faith; set an example to the world how women are equal to men in the eyes of God and the Early Church. Open your heart to the Word of God and teach it to others with passion.

### Be trustworthy like Phoebe!

In a world filled with people against women in ministry, be a “Phoebe”. Phoebe who was filled with the good news of the Gospels and did not keep it to herself. Be a Phoebe and have a role in your church; teach and serve. Be trustworthy to become a servant of God. Be a Phoebe in your interaction with the others, deliver the Word of God and encourage others to live out this Word. Be a Phoebe and do the unexpected; it was not easy nor okay for women to have a role in the early church. But we have Phoebe who gained the trust of the Apostle Paul! How cool is that!



## Be faithful like Mary!

In a world that shames women, be a “Mary”. Mary the Mother of our Lord, one of the most admired female figures in the history of Christianity. Be a Mary when accepting God’s will in your life. Be a Mary to trust God; hear and obey His call. Be a Mary knowing that you are part of God’s plan of salvation. Be a Mary when everyone around you may shame you and humiliate you; be a woman of strong faith. Do everything in the name of God and keep all the Glory to the Great “I Am”. In a world that shames women, be a “Mary”. Be Mary Magdalene who was saved by our Lord Jesus from being a sinful woman to experiencing the Glory of His resurrection. Be a Mary and trust that God has better plans for you; plans that you do not expect. Be a Mary in a world that is in desperate need for faith, hope, love, and most importantly trusting in God. Be a Mary in your commitment to continue Jesus’ ministry on earth.

There are so many women mentioned in the Scriptures who have been as brave, faithful and courageous as men and maybe a bit more. All of these women have faced challenges and experienced fear and doubt but no matter how hard their situations get, they were able to overcome it with the help of God. Do not let anything or anyone pull you away from your faith and the things you like doing. Be courageous like Esther; be equal to a man like Priscilla, be trustworthy like Phoebe, and most importantly be faithful like Mary.

Happy International Women’s Day!

*Nadine Bitar, Catechetical Office of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem*



## Lutheran World Federation message of a delegate at the Commission on the Status of Women

I've intentionally celebrated International Women's Day every year since March 2016. It was my junior year of high school and also a presidential election year in the United States. There were two candidates from the major political parties - one man and one woman.

Political affiliation and ideology aside, hearing friends, family and public figures that I admire demonize the first woman candidate for a major political party was damaging. Sentiments like "America isn't ready for a woman president," "Women are too emotional to lead" or similar, communicated that, for half of the world's population, policy stances and experience often matter less than the body and brain you were born into.

### Anxiety and balm

I saw these conversations happening primarily on social media platforms. Like many American teenagers, I learned from unfettered access to the Internet that the world was not what I thought it was. I spent most of the 2016 election cycle feeling anxious about what my destiny, and the future of my peers in my community and beyond, would hold.



I also learned about Women's History Month. Finally, some balm for the scrapes acquired on this journey of learning more about the historical and current status of women and girls. I spent hours a week reading social media posts and articles, and even more hours listening to podcasts, all about women peacebuilders and change-makers. On 8 March, International Women's Day, I committed to never let this date pass without taking time to remember, to celebrate and to lament—for the rest of my life.

This International Women's Day, my 8th intentional year of celebration, I am a Lutheran World Federation delegate to the 67th UN Commission on the Status of Women. I will be spending the day surrounded by some of the fiercest advocates for gender justice on the entire planet.

This International Women's Day, I will unleash my inner 16-year-old self and all of her fury, love and curiosity. She will proclaim the truth she already knows - that she is truly fierce, dedicated and in full control of her own destiny. This is my prayer:

Stir our souls, boundless Creator.

Wherever we are,

Help us live deeply into our responsibility to the stewardship of community rooted in love.

Whoever we are,

Remind us that we are each beloved and created in your image and likeness.

When-ever we are,

Accompany all generations as we pass on traditions of peacebuilding and peace-waging.

On this International Women's Day,

Be with your people, God who is like a mother hen.

Divinity is our heritage,

Empowerment is our right,

And community is our vehicle.

Because you have created it to be so. Amen.

*Mx. Kayla Zopfi, Hunger Advocacy Fellow, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)*

## Statement of the Religions for Peace World Council

On the occasion of International Women's Day, 8 March 2022, we leaders of diverse faiths, beliefs, traditions and spiritualities, from different countries around the world, come together to acknowledge the crucial role that women have in promoting "gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow."

We acknowledge that women disproportionately suffer—as they have throughout history—the consequences of violent conflict, discrimination, poverty, and restrictions on their freedoms. Yet we also know that women bear significant responsibilities and are the first to respond in situations of social and political unrest that, as we witness with distress, are unfolding in so many corners of our world today. Many women are motivated and strengthened by their faith. Yet, their experiences, stories, knowledge, wisdom, and myriad forms of expertise are too frequently unrecognised and remain underutilized in decision – making contexts.



For over 50 years, Religions for Peace has brought together diverse faith leaders, communities, and institutions to advance gender equality and equip women and girls with the resources that they need to thrive. The impact of the global pandemic on women and girls has only reinforced the urgency of working together towards gender equality, which is one of Religions for Peace's strategic priorities identified in our international movement of faith communities, leaders, and institutions from over 90 countries and regions.

As we work together, we also know, beyond a shadow of doubt, that faiths, collaborating in service, are a powerful force for a just, peaceful, and harmonious coexistence. There is no comparable or parallel force of nature than that of all faiths uniting for positive peace.

On this International Women's Day, we unite our voices to:

Acknowledge the injustice that has been done to women through patriarchal interpretations of our religions that contributed to promoting a perception of women as being of lesser value and possessing less mental and spiritual capacity than men.

Recognize the efforts of all women—and men—who work for peace in families and communities, in every corner of our world;

Commit to being accountable to support the voices, efforts, and leadership of women in our communities and throughout the world;

As we continue our work toward gender equality and women's empowerment during this time of multiple global challenges, we remember also to pray for those still suffering from the many impacts of gender-based inequities and violence.

We reaffirm our commitment to the Religions for Peace mission and purpose: of serving together, for the common good, so as to leave no one behind.



## Conference of European Churches (CEC) webinar, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2023

### *“The role of faith-based actors in political processes – comparative experiences and implications regarding Ukraine and Russia”*

On 24 April the Conference of European Churches organized a webinar on “The Role of faith-based actors in political processes – comparative experiences and implications regarding Ukraine and Russia”. The speaker of the webinar was Alex Shoebridge, Head of Peace Process Support of the Inclusive Peace organisation which is a Swiss-based “think and do tank” approach. It provides expert support at critical junctures in peace and political transition processes and offers evidence-based advice to national and international actors. This webinar offered participants an opportunity for healthy and active debate to bring an enhanced awareness and understanding amongst faith-based actors on their possible contribution to dialogue and political processes on the war in Ukraine.



The topic of the webinar had two parts: a) Comparative experiences: functions and modalities and b) Key factors enabling or constraining effectiveness.

There were presented details of comparative experiences of faith-based actors of conflict solving between Ukraine and Russia that were enriched by the different international examples.

The participants of the webinar had the opportunity to be involved twice in active discussion in break-out groups on the following topics:

#### 1. Enabling and Constraining Factors

- What factors enable and constrain your own engagement within your own religious entity, faith community, and country context on issues relating to the conflict in Ukraine (and Ukraine / Russia relations, including amongst religious actors)?
- What factors enable and constrain the CEC (and the CEC Working Group) in relation to exploring entry points for religious actors to contribute towards peace (or dialogue) amongst religious actors and more broadly in relation to the conflict in Ukraine (including Ukraine/Russia relations, including amongst religious actors)?
- What factors enable and constrain Ukrainian and Russian religious actors in relation to exploring entry points for religious actors to contribute towards peace (or dialogue) amongst religious actors and more broadly in relation to the conflict in Ukraine?

#### 2. Modalities and roles

- What functions and modalities do participants see as visible in relation to the conflict in Ukraine over the next 3 to 6 months? For you as an individual religious leader? For the CEC Working Group?
- What should be visible over the next 6 to 12 months?
- What are the concrete next steps required to work towards these?

*Marianna Apresyan, EFECW Co-President*



Save the date:

**19<sup>th</sup> June 2023, 19:00 (CET)**

**“Let us renew!”**

**Online meeting to discuss “renewal”  
and its meaning for EFECW  
as voiced at last General Assembly.**

***Please support:***

The **Ruth-Epting Fund** ([www.efecw.net](http://www.efecw.net)) - 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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