



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

Newsletter

Autumn 2023



I am looking for you, God, my
saviour!

My soul longs for you,

Your way and truth

Help me and let me find you

Open the way for me

To rejoice in Your word

May my soul be healed by Your
word

And be free!

I thank you for the light of day

I thank you for the peace of my
heart

The freedom of empty hands

The lightness of the empty burden
of expectation

And the gift of faith in love!

Amen

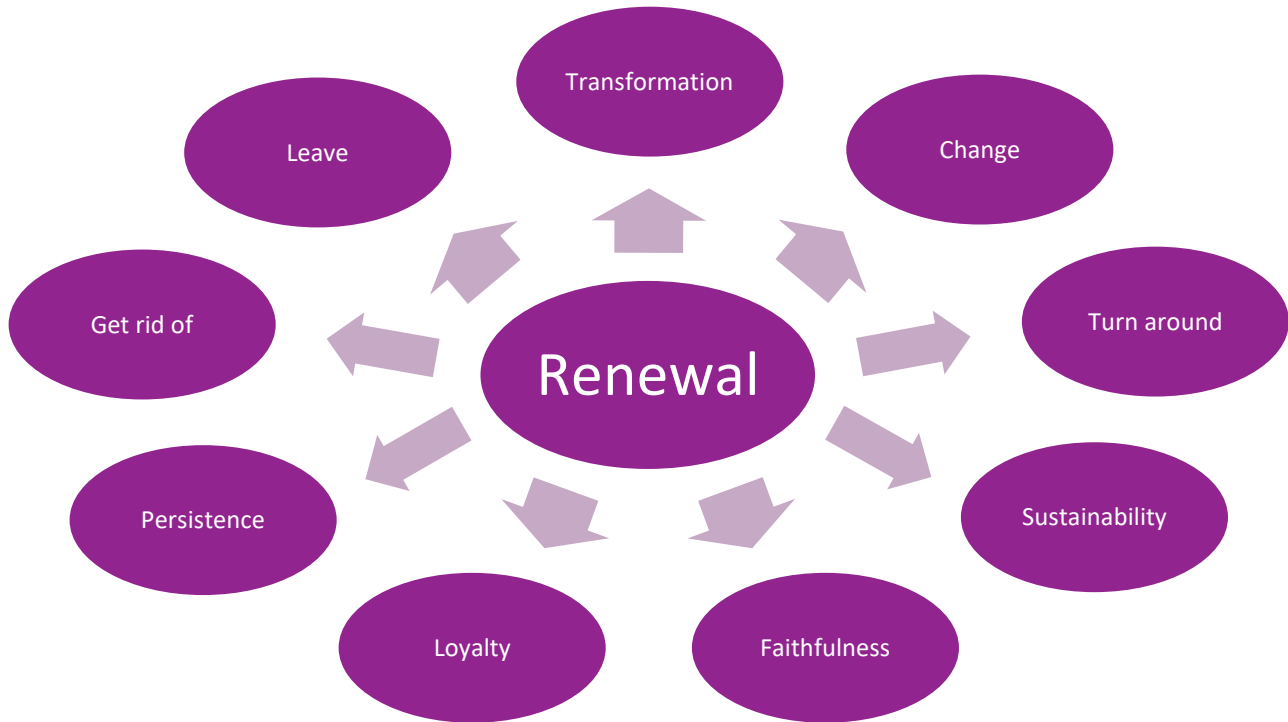
Marijana Ajzenkol, EFECW Co-President

EFECW National Coordinators' meeting

"Let us renew...", 19th June 2023, online

The Coordinating Committee (CC) of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women (EFECW) organised an online meeting for the National Coordinators on 19th June 2023, to reflect together on how to understand the clear message about "renewal" voiced at the last GA in Strasbourg.

NOTE: Following some slides from the CC introduction to the theme:



- Why renewal? God creates a world, a web (net) of life, with humanity a common future.
- As the Archbishop Emerita Antje Jackelén says "The curses of the time" are "the toxic Ps" of our time: polarisation, populism, protectionism, post-truth, and patriarchy." To reverse the trend, all good forces must work together.
- Faith in sustainable development: Partly the world's religions, not least Christianity, are important for how society develops, partly pointing to the fact that our faith also changes and has done throughout the ages.
- Development is also inevitable in the world of faith. But not only that. Renewal is also necessary to preserve the message.
- Jesus did so in his time. He took an interest in the persons he met and the lives they lived. And he interpreted his faith and the tradition so that it could promote life right then and there.
- We must talk about faith in a way that makes faith a gift
- Convert us. It's about us needing to turn around every day. It is not a matter of joining a foreign God, but of turning back to our God and our fellow human beings. To change the way of life is to turn around.
- We see that hope changes but never disappears. "*Martha, Martha,*" the Lord answered, "*you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.*" Luke 10:41-42

On the road to Emmaus

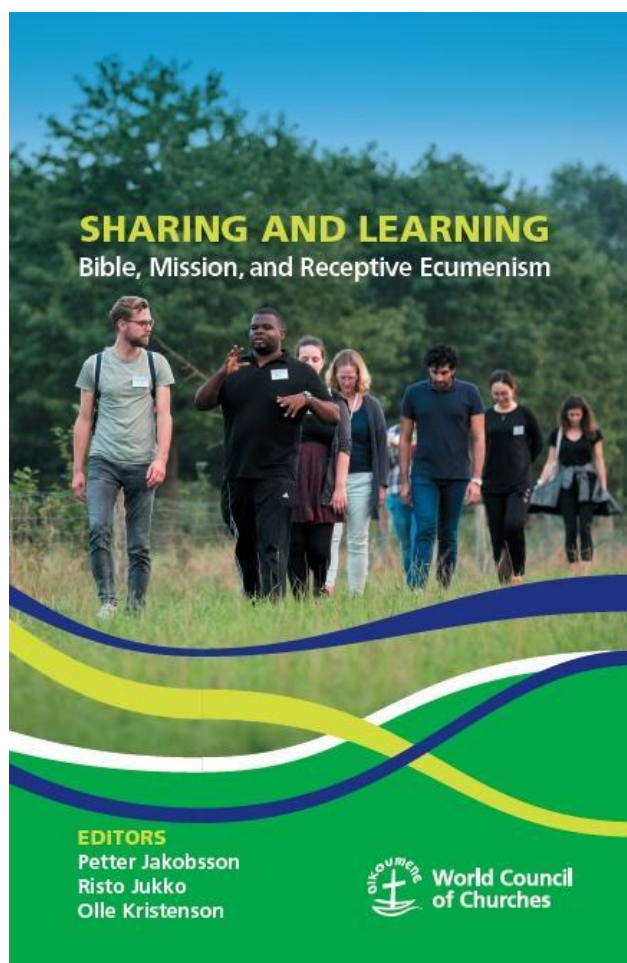
“Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” “What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.” He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.” Luke 24:13-35

- Context, guidance, educational rode, insight
- The realities of present-day contexts have implications for the Forum, for us and the church’s mission and theology. The disciples on the Emmaus Road saw their context differently when Jesus opened the scriptures and revealed himself to them as the resurrected Christ in the breaking of the bread. This enlightenment was necessary for them to make sense of and to address their context in a way that would help and empower and equip them for mission. The church, too, needs to reflect critically on its theology and practice of mission in the light of the Word of God made alive (flesh) by the Holy Spirit within every context.
- The Emmaus Road story does provide a powerful paradigm for the journey of the Forum and churches as they engage with these challenges.



“Do not conform to the world, but be transformed by renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is- his good pleasing and perfect will” . Romans 12:2

- Uppsala 1968 the WCC and 50 years later in 2018. The WCC 4th GA in Uppsala 1968 was a moment where the churches opened for the world's questions in a new way. *“Behold, I make all things new!”* Rev 21:5
- Matthew 5:13 *You are the salt of the earth*; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? (It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled under foot.)
- (14) *You are the light of the world.* (16) In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.
- To whom did Jesus address these words for the first time? They were poor, the poor in spirit, the meek, those who thirst and hunger for righteousness., the peacemakers, those who are clean in their hearts, those who experience difficulties following Jesus Christ.
- There were people as us, with limitations and mistakes, failures and even sins. But as a church in fellowship with all saints, we are called to show the power of the salt and the clarity of the light.
- Receptive Ecumenism: Attitudes and models of learning. Trust, context. To have Faith-reformation. To understand my tradition. Ecumenism-learning to understand my own faith and tradition.



Group discussion

1. How should the Forum present itself today? How to be present today? How do we remain faithful to our vision while renewing the message and the communication means? How to convey the EFECW message to ensure being heard by Christian women at large? And how to convey our message to the churches and the world?

2. What is the new context? Do we stop to discern changes and renew our Forum aims to be a living Christian community of sisters by creating an open and safe space where all women – beyond their differences – are empowered to share their spirituality and to experience faith? How contemporary reality of: diverse gender identity, world politics, war, violence, artificial intelligence, climate change, etc., could transform EFECW?

3. Receptive ecumenism is not about what do others need to receive and learn from our tradition but instead what is it that we need to receive and learn with integrity from others? What gifts and learnings have I and my church received from other's traditions? How the Forum

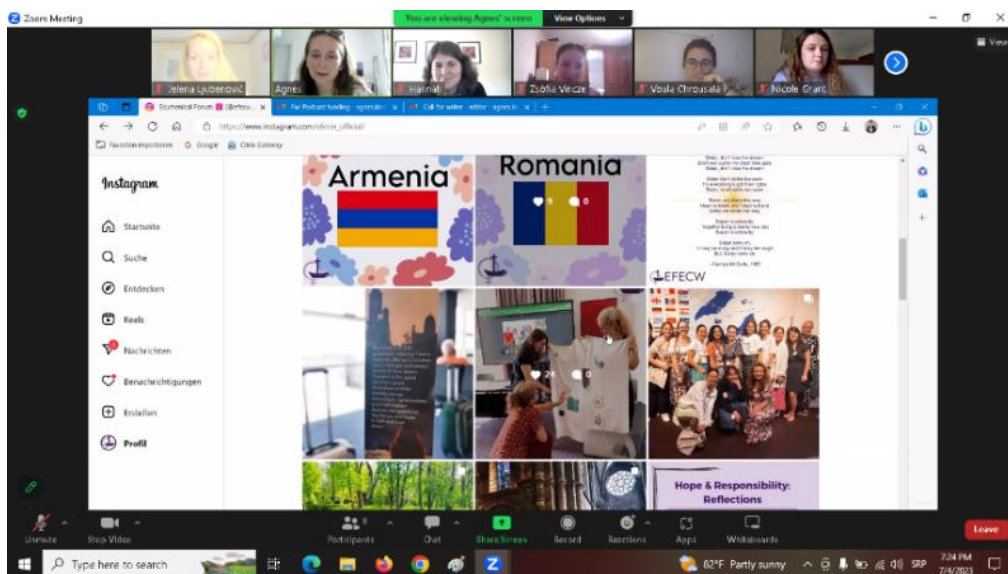
can be a space for this to happen? How do you understand receptive ecumenism from your experience?

EFECW Open Space Discussion for Young Women

Interns meet online almost one year after the GA in Strasbourg

The interns, young women from across Europe that had the opportunity to participate at the General Assembly of the EFECW in August 2022 in Strasbourg, electronically connected in July 2023, almost a year later, to discuss the new developments in their lives as well as the challenges they were currently facing.

After the round of personal updates, the social media team highlighted the importance of activities on social media, mostly Instagram and Facebook. Everyone is invited to create a small presentation of their country for the EFECW social media pages.



In addition to that, the meeting's agenda also included updates on a brand-new method of communication that is in development: a series of podcasts that would be released towards the end of this year. The first episodes will be around the topic of peace. Later on, more topics will be elaborated.

Towards the end of that lovely and reflective afternoon, a new project under the title EFECW Open Space Discussion for young women was announced. The first online meeting will take place July 16 and is meant to offer women a safe and confidential space to have meaningful discussions about issues that concern them.

The interns gathering at that point was incredibly motivating for me as a young woman who is living and working in Europe. The conversation assisted me in understanding the significance of common exchange and mutual support.

Furthermore, as sisters in God seeking Her in our earthly reality, the encounter deepened the ties of our sisterhood.

Stavroula Chrousala

The Beginning of a new European Project

A shake up in the Coordinating Committee (CC) at the GA in Strasbourg last year saw Carla and Fiona handing over the baton for the Young Women's strategy and new CC members, Hannah and Jelena have taken the reigns. Through chat and discussion about the Young Women's strategy and what was growing in importance for young Christian women across Europe today, the four put their heads together and the idea of the Open Space was created.

What is the Open Space?

A new space for young women to express themselves, their personal thoughts and feelings and listen to others. The first meeting took place on Sunday 16th July 2023.

The discussion was agenda free and we started by introducing each other voluntarily and sharing some personal updates and thoughts. During this exchange a particular interest in the topics of intimate relationships as well as intimate partner violence and abuse, the issue of consent, and the difficulty of taking right life choices were established.



We decided as a group to design the next Open Space Discussions a bit differently by defining a monthly topic beforehand that will be introduced by a short presentation prepared by Hannah and Jelena and then an open discussion around this topic.

The Open Space is an exciting opportunity for young women to be heard, feel listened to, and to discuss freely and without judgement. The topics discussed are completely directed by the women attending and are focussed around the issues prevalent in the lives of young Christian women today.

Nicole Grant

“Thoughts on Love and Relationships”, 20th August

After the General Assembly in Strasbourg 2022, we created a Google Group for all former stewards and interns since the GA 2014 in Tinos. Through this group we regularly send out interesting information and invitations to events as our new project that is called ‘Open Space Discussion for Young Women’.



On Sunday the 20th August at 7pm CET the second Open Space Discussion for Young Women took place. The invitation was sent out two weeks ahead via the interns/stewards Google Group with the request to share topics of interest. We received several replies out of which we created the first session around the topics of ‘love’ and ‘relationships’.

We started the session with a short introductory round of personal updates. Jelena and I then presented a power point presentation that we had prepared over the course of two weeks. We established a group contract for our communication that includes mutuality, respect, confidentiality, equality, and mindfulness. It is our goal to have a safe space of trust and support that allows a natural process of giving and taking. This serves us as a basis to empower each other as

young women from across Europe and to create a support map between ourselves.

Why is life balance important?

- Physical Environment
- Health
- Friends / Family
- Money
- Career / Bussiness
- Partner / Relationship
- Fun / Social Life
- Personal Growth

A circular inset image showing a person in a white shirt holding a bouquet of dried flowers. The person's hands are visible, and the flowers are in a dark blue or black container.

In the following we presented how a healthy life balance can look like and the importance of it. We engaged with the differences between healthy and unhealthy love, a healthy relationship quiz, the

model of the three levels of attraction/connection that humans can share, and what an important base before entering a relationship contains. We also shared further helpful resources on consent, healthy relationship skills, red flags of abuse, narcissism, and the person everyone should marry.

There are generally three levels of attraction / connection:

- Body - physical
- Mind - mental
- Soul – emotional

✓ If all three levels are given it is ideal. It should be the goal to have all three levels in order to have a good base upon which a long lasting, healthy, happy, fulfilled and satisfying relationship can be build while work still needs to be continuously put in.

Important base before entering a relationship:

➤ To know oneself with healthy self esteem, self awareness, self love, confidence, independence, self satisfaction, inner peace and the will to learn and grow

Better no relationship than a bad one with the wrong person!

After the input, we opened the discussion and had a very insightful and enriching personal exchange of our own experiences, thoughts, fears, difficulties etc.

All in all, the session was very successful. Below two anonymised texts are shared that we received as feedback via email:

Dear sisters,

I would like to add my conclusion for today's topic, from our Open Space gathering, on "Finding a spouse".

*So, from my experience of not ever even being in a relationship, is that I think it is important to first **find inner peace and happiness. Practice being comfortable in your own skin. Knowing yourself before you try to know someone else** is vital to ever finding someone special. **Love yourself.***

*Never rush the process of building a bond with someone. I had a problem of feeling bored or just lonely so I would go and do something bold to try and get some action... I know it probably sounds silly; it was silly. I laugh at myself when I think back. **Patience is truly a virtue.***

*It's important to accept the hard fact that **maybe you will end up alone**, but you will never be truly alone if you surround yourself with people who make you feel good. **Take care of the good people in your life that you already have and be open to new people! Put yourself out there, join groups, clubs, whatever!** The world is a big place and by doing the things you like (by being yourself) you will eventually find amazing new people who will love you for who you are. **So just be yourself.***

Take care of yourself and I hope to see you very soon!!! <3 <3 <3

First of all, I would like to thank you for your time and for your hard-work to make our meeting happen.

Secondly, thank you for your amazing presentation and time-table. I am truly grateful that you took into consideration my experience and my tips.

Thirdly and lastly, as promised, I am sending you my feedback and comments.

Ideas of topics for the next meeting:

Self-care and self-love. How to re-build self-confidence after toxic relationship/s. I think this topic would logically connect "Thoughts on love and relationships" and new topic on "self-care and self-love". As, you mentioned in your presentation it's important to have a base before entering a relationship. (To know oneself with healthy self-esteem, self-awareness, self-love, confidence, independence, self-satisfaction, inner peace and the will to learn and grow).

My thoughts after the meeting:

It is crucial that young women have a space to share their experience and learn from each other. I felt honesty, respect, humour, time-management, courage, support, safety, trust, inspiration, motivation, urgent need to share, refreshment and no shame which is one of the most important feelings that I am scared of, while I share my deepest emotions and pain.

You are all great and wonderful!

Thank you!

We are very happy about our new Open Space sessions and the opportunity for young women to reflect on very important life topics.

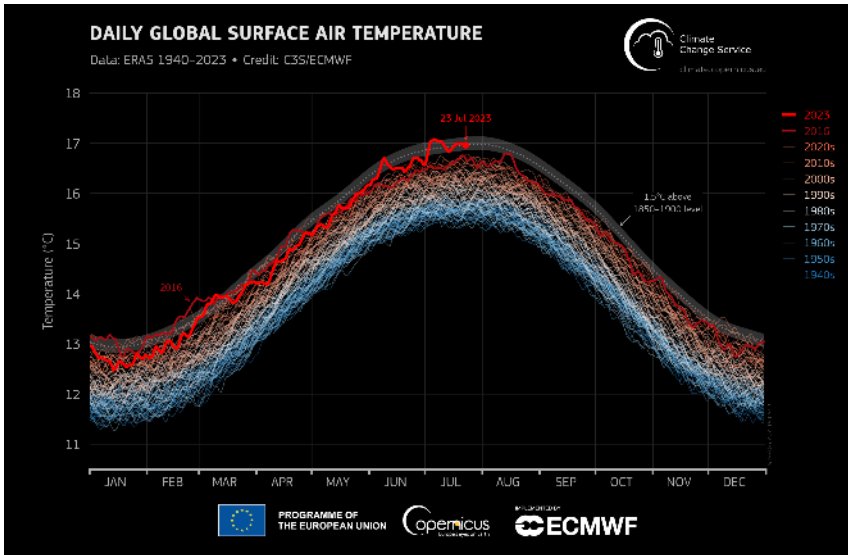
Through the widening of our knowledge and awareness as well as the exchange of our personal experiences so far along with our thoughts, questions, fears etc., we get closer to each other, we learn from each other, and we share a fruitful journey of growth.

I am very enthusiastic and already looking forward to the next Open Space Discussions.

Hannah Wehner, member of EFECW CC

Reflections on climate change and the question of our responsibility as Christians

According to data from the EU-funded Copernicus Climate Change Service the first three weeks of July have been the warmest three-week period on record. These temperatures have been related to heatwaves in large parts of North America and Europe, which along with wildfires in countries including Canada and Greece, have had major impacts on people's health, the environment and economies. As the United Nations Secretary General warns "The age of global warming is over, it's time for the age of global boiling"¹.



As a result, many Christians worldwide may find themselves stranded during the "global boiling" (a time of climatic change), unable to communicate the kind of revelation and eschaton the time brings. Christians need to find a language and way of rediscovering the meaning of responsibility and hope².

We are accountable for the natural world, according to the biblical narrative of Genesis 1

and 2. We must respect and honor the Creator as the earthly creatures are made in the image of God in order to live in peace with other people (Gen. 1:26–30; Ps. 8:5-8; Rom. 1:2–23). For this reason, as noted by the German psychiatrist Willy Hellpach (1877-1955) humans are geopsyche; our identities are both personal and collective; and our psychology is social, spatial, and climatic, which is highly contextual. Additionally, as a response to climate change, hope can enlighten and enrich the language. The event of Christ's resurrection is connected to hope, a cornerstone of Christianity. According to Jürgen Moltmann (1926-), one of the most well-known theologians of our time, hope not only finds solace in suffering but also acts as a protest the divine promise against suffering. So, in accordance with Jürgen Moltmann's words, theology must continue to denounce the systems and structures that cause the suffering brought on by climatic change. The biblical account of the flood provides one of the best illustrations of responsibility and hope. It can be viewed as the end of one creation and the start of a new covenant. Climatic change is analogous to a flood and can be seen as a paradigm shift. We must emulate Noah's family and apply Noah's teachings as responsible human beings³.

Stavroula Chrousala

¹ Copernicus climatic change service. Copernicus and WMO: July 2023 is on track to be the hottest month on record. <https://climate.copernicus.eu/copernicus-and-wmo-july-2023-track-be-hottest-month-record>. Accessed 8 August 2023.

² For official statements please read the second encyclical of Pope Francis *Laudato si'* and the book of John Chryssavgis. *On Earth as in Heaven: Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*. Fordham University Press. 2011 in which describes the work of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

³ See Bergmann, Sigurd, ed. *Eschatology as Imagining the End: Faith Between Hope and Despair*. London: Routledge, 2018 and Moltmann, Jürgen. *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*. Translated by W. Leitch. 4de dr. London: SCM, 1974.

The Social Media Team

The Social media team consists of 3 interns Agnes, Zsofi, Manana and their mentor and CC member Jelena Ljubenovic. The main purpose of the team is to introduce the EFECW and its work to the world, using their creativity and knowledge of modern technology, specifically social media networks. There's a warm and friendly atmosphere in the team, as no work is forced and everyone chooses what they want to do or which task they want to work on. They are currently posting about the forum's activities on Facebook and Instagram.



"Social media is not just a media. It is a catalyst for creativity that allows people to transcend limitations and transforms the way we perceive our own capabilities. I'm pretty grateful for the opportunity to communicate with the wonderful girls in our social media team who make the EFECW Instagram account harmonious with their daily efforts and creativity."

— Jelena Ljubenović, CC member of the EFECW

Social media has been the most important platform of acquiring information, thus it is a great responsibility and honour at the same time to be in charge of it.

- Zsofi



Social media is an amazing way for reaching out to more people as well as keeping in touch with current and past members and creating a community spirit. Let's build bridges between what we do online and our in-person meetings!

— Agnes



When used properly, social media is a great tool for introducing you and your work to the world. Being in the SM team is very enjoyable, thanks to the creative and hardworking ladies in the team, but it is also a great responsibility, as people will get to know the EFECW through the content YOU made.

— Manana



Women in Faith

Santoukhd, first Armenian saint



Those who honour me I will honour (1 Samuel 2:30)

Today you don't have to choose between a sword and a crown, but you do have many chances to follow Jesus Christ. Sometimes being loyal to Jesus means you will have to give up things you like or want. Remembering Saint Santoukhd's choice can help you decide.

The story of St. Santoukhd, the first Armenian saint, is inextricably bound to that of Saint Thaddeus. Thaddeus, one of Christ's holy disciples, was

charged by Peter, leader of the disciples, to spread Christianity in Armenia in the 1st century A.D.

In his travels to northern Armenia, he bearing the spear given him by Peter and he preached the Word of Life, performed many astonishing miracles there, and baptized many believers. Among the many people who converted to Christianity was Santoukhd, daughter of King Sanatruk, King of Armenia. One night the young and beautiful Princess Santoukhd, the king's daughter, went to see Thaddeus and find out about the new religion herself. According to accounts, she changed her royal garments and dressed in ordinary clothes and was led by a servant to a house where these early Christian meetings were held. Santoukhd received instruction from Thaddeus, and when she declared her belief in Christ and was baptized, a sign from heaven designated her as a holy virgin. Her father worshipped many gods and she was afraid that they would be angry because his daughter was a follower of Jesus Christ. He had many of the Christians killed and Santoukhd thrown in prison.

Santoukhd continued to worship God and believe in Jesus. As a princess, she had a very good life but knew that there was something more to life than good clothes, good food, and good times. When she became a Christian she learned it did not matter whether she was rich or poor, or whether she was beautiful or plain. She learned that Jesus loves everyone. She grew to love Jesus more than anything.

Her father tried to get her to change her mind. He thought that the hardship of prison would convince her to give up believing in Jesus. He even offered her more honours than she had before if she would go back to worshipping his gods. But Santoukhd was firm. She probably wanted to obey her father, but she knew she must obey God's will above all. Her father asked her to choose either the sword or a crown. She chose the sword knowing it meant she would be killed. She did not choose the crown which meant she would be free to go back to the palace. She would not change her faith. She was loyal to Our Lord.

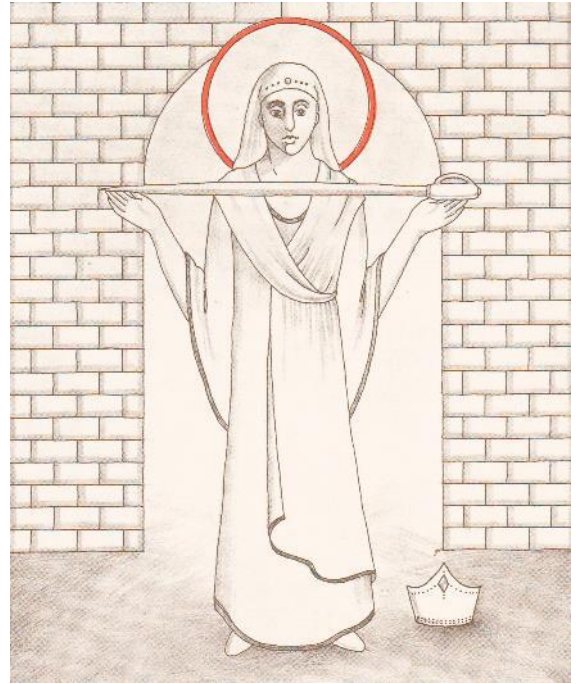
One account of her death states that immediately after one of the soldiers thrust his sword into the holy virgin's heart "a sweet fragrance filled the air and a light shone from heaven in the form of a

fiery pillar that hovered over Santoukhd's body for three days and three nights." The more than 2,000 people that witnessed these events, it is said, all converted and were baptized that night. St. Santoukhd's body was buried and entombed by St. Thaddeus at the same site.

St. Santoukhd was martyred on the 15th of December, and the apostle St. Thaddeus, eight days later.

Santoukhd was the first Armenian martyr. Her example of a brave woman and the steadfast love of Jesus encouraged Armenians then as it does now. She received the honour of being called a saint.

Reflection: Do we able to go out of our comfort zone, stable life and to change our life to follow Jesus? What inspire us in saint Santoukhd story? Have you experienced to make change in your life for God's love?



Dr. Marianna Apresyan, EFECW Co-President

«WOMEN IN FAITH»



Within the EFECW priorities, we start a new series of interesting and informative articles about women in faith that may enrich our spirituality and make us reflect on their influential experience in Christian and non-Christian environment.

The articles will be accessible on EFECW newsletter and social media.

Editor of series: Dr. Marianna Apresyan (EFECW Co-President)

Frequency of the articles: Every trimester

EFECW Representation work

Council of Europe, INGOs Conference

EFECW representation work is inspired by Ruth Epting's vision of a reconciled European cohabitation and a common European identity and EFECW's mission priorities to be a recognised voice of Christian women in Church and public life in Europe.

It seemed important to the Forum, at a time when we are seeing the rise of hard-line populism and the decline of democracy in several countries in Europe, to strengthen our openness and to do our bit to build a better way of living together. As Christian women, and evidently in the Forum, we have to engage in the defence of human rights, and to fight for the dignity of the voiceless. The Gospel says nothing else!

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation including several working institutions. One of these institutions is the Conference of INGOs, as the voice of civil society. The proposals made to the Council of Europe by this Conference are the result of work done in various officially accepted Committees. Substantive work is carried on by those Committees.



I am representing the Forum (with the agreement of EFECW Coordinating Committee) at the Conference and two of its Committees:

- a. Committee of "NGOs as advocates for gender equality and women's rights"
- b. Committee for "Interreligious and Interconvictional dialogue"

NGOs as advocates for gender equality and women's rights

(We work mainly via the Internet: e-mails, Zoom and video conferences)



The Committee "NGOs as advocates of gender equality and women's rights" seeks to enable NGOs to promote the Council of Europe's ground-breaking conventions and recommendations concerning women's rights and gender equality in their respective NGO and in civil society. The objective is to explore and develop concrete strategies, advocacy activities and tools to make the Council of Europe conventions better known and implemented in the member states and the civil society. The Committee encompasses a broad variety of NGOs with focus on women's rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Activities:

- A webinar: “NGOs and the Monitoring of the Istanbul Convention - how, as an NGO, can we assist the monitoring body, GREVIO, by reporting non-compliance.” 150 participants from all over Europe from different NGOs took part. This webinar aimed at raising INGOs awareness of the relevant convention, like the Istanbul Convention, for them to disseminate the legal instrument, and to inform citizens about their rights. After the webinar, the Istanbul Convention’s secretariat received several requests and observations from NGOs concerning the implementation of the Istanbul Convention.



- A module on Gender Equality to eliminate gender stereotypes and clichés – for children between 12 and 14 years old.

- Disseminated a questionnaire amongst the Committee’s INGOs to get a clearer picture of the target groups and what is needed

- A statement on “The situation of women in Ukraine”

- A statement on “The Right of Women and Girls”

- A statement on “Covid-19 Impacts on Women”

Future plans:

- Observing critical situations for women and girls under the gender perspective. This study will be continued, as it is one of the objectives of this committee to provide a summary/compilation of different projects, conducted by committee members, serving as examples for other INGOs’ advocacy efforts.

- Spring 2024: Colloquium or webinar on "Gender equality, place of men and women in religions/beliefs" or “Religions as an obstacle to women's rights?” in cooperation with the committee "Interreligious and Interconvictional Dialogue”

- Migrant women - specific problems and dangers - protection.

Interreligious and Interconvictional dialogue

(We work by mail, zoom and videoconferences but the backbone of this committee is a small core of 5 people of which I am a member and we work together face to face in Strasbourg every month or depending on the possibility and presence of each member in Strasbourg).

Freedom of religion and conscience is an inalienable, indivisible and universal human right. Religion and conscience touch all areas of human existence. However, this right is not absolute, but must always be seen in the context of other human rights. This is what our committee is working for together with other INGOs. Discrimination and conflict often result from a lack of in-depth knowledge of different cultures, individuals and their beliefs and convictions. The more knowledge is opened up, the more understanding and empathy can develop.

- We strive to involve religious and philosophical communities as a driving force of intercultural dialogue and to associate them with the responsibility of civil society as important factors of intercultural dialogue for human rights, freedom of conscience and religion.
- In today's rapidly digitalising multicultural society, a thorough education and knowledge of different religions, worldviews and beliefs is a real challenge. The differences between people are sometimes felt as a clash of identities and some of them seem more alien and dangerous. This is even more true when these different specificities are carried by migrants.
- Within our committee, we are collecting examples of inspiring good practice in dialogue. Our aim is to collect and discuss them in order to highlight how they can contribute to openness to others and be proposed as models.

An important goal of our committee is to establish a permanent, inclusive platform for interreligious and Interconvictional dialogue in the Council of Europe. The Interreligious and Interconvictional dialogue is one of the important means of preventing and combating prejudice, rejection of otherness, hatred, and violence against the other, who is different in culture and religion.

By enabling a better knowledge and understanding, it contributes to demining sensitive and controversial inter-religious issues. In view of the current challenges, these are only increasing.



Activities:

- 01/07/2021: Presentation of the film on EMOUNA (a programme on interfaith education at Sciences Po University) followed by an exchange with Pauline Bebe, the first woman rabbi in France and head of EMOUNA. <https://www.emouna.org/>
- 16/12/2021: Webinar presenting the SASCE project (Safer and Stronger Communities in Europe). This multi-faceted project, funded by the European Commission, aims to significantly improve safety in and around places of religious practice, as well as within and between Buddhist, Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities. Information: www.sasce.eu
- 18/01/2022: Meetings and exchanges with the "Dialogue Unit of the EPP Group in the European Parliament" in order to present the work of the Conference of INGOs and in particular that of our Committee for Interreligious & Interfaith Dialogue. Other contacts and invitations followed.
- 15/03/2022: Joint statement on the war in Ukraine and a call for peace.
- 01/04/2022: Webinar "From knowledge to mutual recognition in interreligious and interconvictional dialogue". Identity formation in Europe through mutual recognition in interreligious and interconvictional dialogue.
- 13/10/2022: Webinar on "Self-awareness as a key to intercultural and interfaith understanding".
- 27/03/2023 Webinar on "The fundamental importance of education for interreligious and interfaith dialogue".

Future plans:

- Autumn 2023: Webinar on the inter-religious and inter-convictional dimension of welcoming migrants and refugees - In connection with the Committee on the Rights of Migrants
- Autumn Session 2023: Concert "Sacrées Journées" (Holy days) - The next "Sacrées Journées" festival will take place in Strasbourg from 15 to 22 October 2023. (The session of the CINGO will take place the week before the festival, from 9 to 12 October 2023.) This festival contributes to fostering intercultural and interreligious dialogue through music, a universal language. Concerts, musical encounters, conferences, workshops, exhibitions and talks are organised every year. At each concert, in the same place of worship, musical ensembles from different religions, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism... perform. The performances take place in the Cathedral, in Churches, Synagogues, Pagods, Mosques, in Strasbourg and other cities in Alsace and in Kehl in Germany.
- Spring 2024: Colloquium or webinar on "Gender equality, place of men and women in religions/beliefs" or "Religions as an obstacle to women's rights?" in cooperation with the committee "NGOs as advocates for gender equality and women's rights"
- Spring 2024. It's also important to focus also on interconvictionality; the Committee will participate in the organisation of the "Interconvictional Fair" in Brussels and plan to hold it also in Strasbourg in 2025.
- Presentation of concrete examples of inspiring practices in the field of interreligious and interconvictional education.
- Publication of a digital guide.
- Webinars on the "Complexity of spiritual care in plural societies", interreligious and interconvictional spiritual care in times of crisis, in difficult life situations, with the military, in hospitals, in prisons, etc.
- Education: promoting a caring and more inclusive environment in schools, colleges and high schools.



I take great pleasure in talking about the Forum to those around me in the corridors of the Council of Europe and in the various committees. People are very interested in our unique approach: European women who share a faith and a sisterhood in ecumenism focused on the defence of the weakest and especially the defence of women.

By working in these two Committees, the Forum fully realises the aims that are constitutive of our action as European Christian women.

We work seriously but joyfully and with respect for each other to build a more just and fraternal world.

Every human being is the Face of the Lord.

Anne-Marie Schott, NC Coordinator and ex-member of EFECW CC



Women in Dialogue for Peace

The dilemma between the right for self-defense and the desire for non-violence. A feminist view

Reinhild Traitler Symposium

On the Panel:

Dr. Ursula Baatz

author, journalist, Roman Catholic theologian, intercultural philosopher

Viola Raheb, MA, PhD.

Pro Oriente, Austria-Palestine, Lutheran theologian

Dr. Susanne Scholl

Journalist and former foreign correspondent in Russia, Jewish background

Jennifer Miftaroska

Muslim, teacher, studies in political science, EPIL graduate

Moderation: Yalda Shariati

Muslim, EPIL graduate



Followed by a buffet

Entry € 20,- students € 10,-

Monday, 30.10.2023 - 17:00

Curhaus, Stephansplatz 3, 1010 Vienna



Dr. Reinhild Traitler (1940-2022) was an Austrian philologist and theologian, worked at the World Council of Churches in Geneva, headed later the Protestant Conference and Study Center in Boldern and was one of the founders of the European Project for Interreligious Learning (EPIL).

A year after Reinhild Traitler's death and in remembrance of her inspiring life, we host this EPIL Symposium for all participants of five EPIL Study Courses since 2002 and all interested men and women.

Contact: epil@gmx.at Websites: www.epil.ch and www.efecw.net

Ecumenical and other news

Lutheran World Federation

Women Pre-Assembly, 8-11 September 2023, Wroclaw, Poland

The LWF Women's Pre-Assembly was a unique opportunity for women from member churches and partner organisations to meet and articulate a common voice for the Assembly.

What are the struggles women face in the diverse contexts of member churches? How are women answering to call to vocation in ordained ministry?



The Women's Pre-Assembly considered how we ensure the full and just participation of women in the life of church and society.

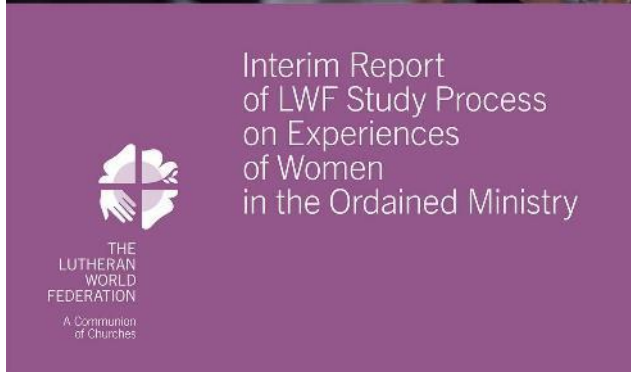
Objectives:

- To experience sisterhood and sorority, pray together, and support one other
- To celebrate life as One Body, One Spirit, One Hope, reflecting on the Assembly theme through a feminist perspective
- To build a shared vision that decisively shapes the discussions and decisions of the Assembly by highlighting women's contribution to ministry, to the life of the church, and on theological reflection
- To harvest experiences and celebrate the building of gender justice in church and society
- To reflect on the [interim report](#) of the Study Process on the Experiences of Women in the Ordained Ministry (following executive summary and recommendations)

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has finalized the first phase of a study to understand the experiences of women's empowerment and challenges in the ordained ministry among the member churches. The learnings of this study will inform strategies to remove barriers, support and strengthen the full inclusion of women in the ordained ministry.

The study was carried out in response to resolutions and commitments made by the Twelfth LWF Assembly, which emphasized the importance of gender justice and the full and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of church life, including the ordained ministry. The study process began in 2021, after facing delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic and changes at the LWF Communion Office. Responses were received until April 2022.

The methodology employed Feminist Participatory Action Research methods, including online forms to collect experiences and stories from women who are ordained, focusing on their empowerment and affirmation, as well as the challenges and struggles they face. The collected material was then analyzed by the LWF Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment program executive and network coordinators, as well as the Women Doing Theology network.



The study acknowledged certain methodological limitations, including an imbalanced response rate across regions, with one region representing a significant majority of the responses. The COVID-19 pandemic and organizational changes also affected the distribution and engagement levels in certain regions. Additionally, limitations related to survey responses, limited internet access, and concerns about recognition or exposure were taken into account.

Efforts were made to mitigate these limitations, such as providing additional translations, involving regional leadership, and validating the findings through Women's Regional Pre-Assemblies prior to the Thirteenth Assembly. Although not all LWF regions were equally represented, the responses received provided valuable insights into the experiences of women

in the ordained ministry.

The study's outcomes will serve as a guide for future efforts to address barriers to the full and meaningful participation of women in the ministry. Further analysis of the responses and development of theological content, including papers, methodologies, and materials for reflection, study, support, and discernment, will be completed by 2025.

Recommendations:

To encourage ongoing support and accompaniment for women in ministry. Ordination is an important step, but equal emphasis must be placed on supporting the lived experiences of those called to serve.

To review and change structures that hinder women in ordained ministry to flourish and grow in leadership roles. While ordination is a shared commitment of the LWF, it is crucial to acknowledge that without changes in structures designed with male experiences as the standard, women's gifts may struggle to be valued and embraced as a blessing to the entire body of Christ.

Further reflection and the development of materials are necessary in several areas, including confessional matters, theological anthropology, the theology of sacrifice, embodiment, power and authority, gender justice, and on the implementation of policies to prevent and protect women from harassment and violence.

Provide ongoing possibilities for sharing and listening, fostering a supportive environment where women feel safe and empowered to express their unique perspectives and contribute to the collective journey toward gender justice and the full inclusion of women in the ordained ministry.

- To learn from each other, in connection with the Assembly theme, about ways to respond to gender-based violence, poverty, political, religious, and social polarization, and discrimination
- To contribute to helping the LWF Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment Program better address the concerns of women in participants' contexts over the coming years
- To shape the message from the Women's Pre-Assembly to the Thirteen Assembly

Message (excerpt), LWF 13th Assembly, Kraków, Poland, 13-19 September 2023

(...) One Body: In worship, we reflected on the incarnation, when God became a baby in a manger, a vulnerable body of flesh and blood. The incarnation challenges us to recognize God in every person and in all of creation, acknowledging our deep-down unity.

(...) On the tenth anniversary of the LWF Gender Justice Policy, we celebrate the progress we have made and reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the empowerment of women and to an end to sexual and gender-based violence, which saw a sharp increase during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We call for stronger partnerships between women and men to combat patriarchy and we affirm an understanding of masculinity that is characterized by caring, nurturing, and serving.

We reiterate the call of the LWF, first made almost four decades ago, to affirm the full participation of women in the ordained ministry. There should be no distinction between the ordained ministry of women and men.

We are crying with women who are still denied their equal dignity and suffer oppression on racial, cultural or religious pretexts. We call for theological reflection and education around gender justice and the continuous empowerment of women and girls, ensuring that they can enjoy a future that is fair and just and full of opportunities.

We are stronger because of diverse participation in the life of the communion. We commit ourselves to working for increased intergenerational justice. While some progress has been made, we do not take this for granted. We must do better to ensure meaningful participation of youth in all areas of church life, including governance and decision-making. (...)



Religions for Peace, UK

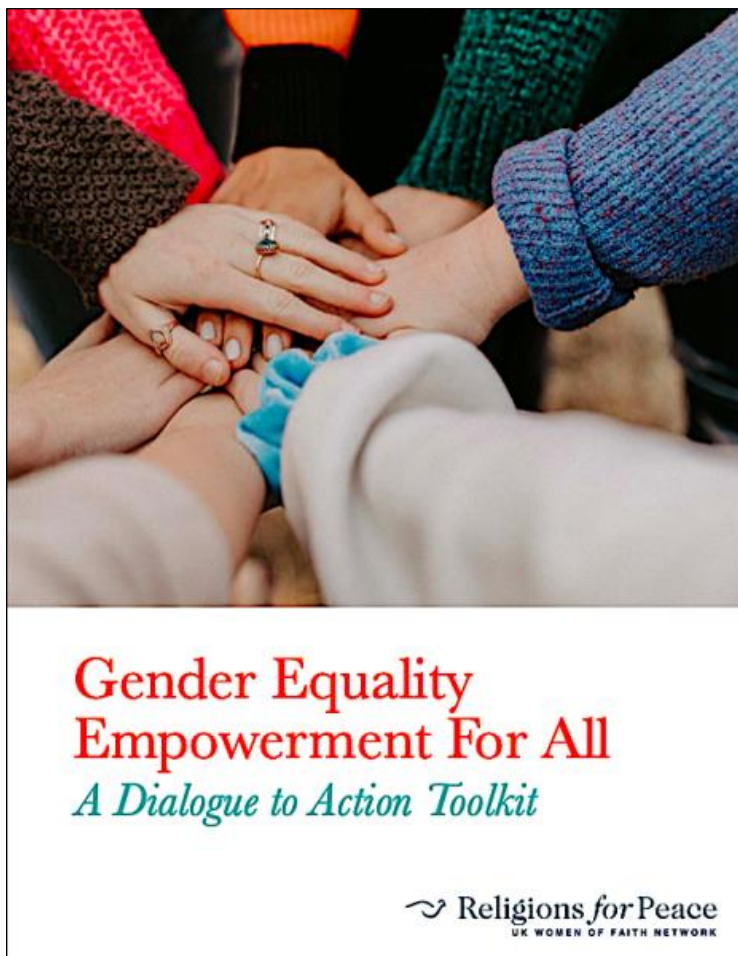
Gender Equality-Empowerment For All: From dialogue to action toolkit

United Kingdom Women Network Religions for Peace presented the 'Gender Equality Empowerment for All' Symposium and the launch of the "Dialogue to Action" Toolkit.

On 15th June 2023, a diverse group of people from different faith and belief traditions gathered together both in-person at the St. Ethelburga's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation and [online](#) to participate in the UKWFN Symposium, marking the culmination of past projects as well as putting heads together to discuss ways forward.

We welcomed speakers from our Women in Religious Scriptures webinars, to find in on [YouTube channel](#):

We also invited Male Allies from 16 Days against Gender-based Violence campaign to share their thoughts, you can catch their discussions also on [YouTube](#)



In the afternoon UKWFN announced the From Dialogue to Action Toolkit and went into workshops to take participants through our project methodology and shared views (download here <https://www.rfpuk.org/resources/202306TOOLKIT.pdf>) and participants in-person or online were first given a run through of how to bring the Dignity of Women exhibition (download here <https://www.rfpuk.org/resources/DignityExhibition.pdf>) and the related discussions to their own communities. All participants discussed how they would utilise the 'From Dialogue to Action' Toolkit and how the workshop we ran will be helpful to them.

 Religions for Peace
UNITED KINGDOM

World Council of Churches, Central Committee

Statement on the 75th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness' Genesis 1:26

A few months after the founding Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Amsterdam in August 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 "as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations".[1] The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), created in 1946 in anticipation of the establishment of the WCC, had contributed directly to the drafting of the UDHR, especially Article 18 on freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Both the adoption of the UDHR and the foundation of the WCC were, in different ways and to different degrees, reactions to the atrocities perpetrated during the Second World War and in recognition of the need for unity and international cooperation for human dignity. As people of faith, we recognize the image of the Creator God in every human being as the foundation of our engagement for human dignity and rights.



This year, in which we mark the 75th anniversary of both the WCC and the UDHR the WCC central committee acknowledges the shared values that underpin both. At the same time, we acknowledge the many ways and places in which God-given human dignity is threatened and imperilled, by resurgent authoritarian repression of freedoms, by conflict, occupation and forced displacement, by discrimination and prejudice, by persecution, by rampant economic inequality and persistent extreme poverty, by violent extremism, by social media misinformation and hate speech, by the abuse of artificial intelligence and other new technologies, and by anthropogenic climate change and the lack of climate justice. Moreover, though recognizing the many advances in normative standards and human rights protection mechanisms achieved since the adoption of the UDHR, we

acknowledge the grave threats posed by populist nationalism and rising authoritarianism to the “common standard of achievement” represented in the UDHR and the canon of international human rights law that flowed from it.

We recall the important processes and discussions leading up to and at the WCC 11th Assembly on the relationship between Christian faith principles and international human rights law, and we affirm the statement on ‘Christian Witness and Action for Human Dignity and Human Rights’ adopted by the WCC executive committee in November 2022.

Following the executive committee, we acknowledge the prophets’ call to God’s covenanted people to work for justice and peace, to care for the poor, the outcast, and the marginalized, and to be a light to the nations (Micah 6:8; Isaiah 49:6), and recognize the calling to a lived faith that embodies Christ’s example, affirming the dignity and worth of all, regardless of race, gender, class, religion or any other characteristic.

Therefore, in this 75th anniversary year, the central committee invites all WCC member churches and ecumenical partners to:



- Reflect on the common history and shared purposes of the WCC and the UDHR;
- Acknowledge our special responsibility as communities of faith who recognize the image of God in all people to renew our commitment for the human dignity and rights of all;
- Recommit to a compassionate, practical and active response to the voices, cries and lived experiences of the women, children and men who experience the violation of their human dignity and rights;
- Engage with and through the WCC in dialogue on the differences in perspective and approach within the ecumenical movement in order to work towards common conclusions and recommendations for churches to recognize and affirm the biblical roots of human dignity as a basis for the modern codification of human rights, and to advocate for human rights and for the rule of law as an integral part of churches’ life and witness.



Prayer

After the summer period, Lord, give us the courage and the desire, throughout this new year of work and activity, to discover Your Presence in the daily routine of our lives.

May our hearts come to meet You in sharing with all our sisters of the Ecumenical Forum, in our commitments in our different communities, in prayer and especially in prayer for peace, but also through the child who discovers you, the young person who seeks You, the person who suffers, the woman who is not respected, the migrant who knocks on our doors, the poor rejected person.

Give us the joy of knowing that You are always present in our midst and in each one of us.

May our hands open to gather Your Light and pass it on joyfully, so that the rays of Your Grace may spread to all.

Give us the audacity to bear witness on every road, by our actions and our words, to how great is Your unconditional Love for us.

May the Forum, where sisterhood is lived, be a sign of hope, faith and charity.

Amen

Anne-Marie Schott, ex-member EFECW CC



Please support:

The **Ruth-Epting Fund** (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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