



**EFECW**

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

# NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2024



*I do not know what the New year will  
look like*

*but I know what the Old year was  
like*

*For everything good in it, thank  
You God*

*For everything sinful in it, forgive.*

*And the New 2024. You, Lord, bless*

*give us Yourself, Your peace and  
Your joy in it, too.*

*You are, God, eternal and You  
remain always the same*

*I trust You with all my heart and  
give You myself and all mine*

*Take us by the hand and lead us  
through all the days of this year.*

*Give us a brave heart to fight good  
battles*

*Help us to gratefully accept from  
Your hand all You send to us,*

*and let no one take away from us  
what we have come to know as the  
truth: Your love*

*Amen*

*Photo credit: Saša Montiljo, Prayer: Marijana Ajzenkol*



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## Message Coordinating Committee Meeting

Vienna, 26-29 October 2023

*"He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love."  
Ephesians (4:16)*

The Coordinating Committee (CC) of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women (EFECW) met in Vienna, Austria 26th – 29th October 2023, welcomed to Vienna by Gabi Kienesberger, our treasurer.



We met against of terror and conflict in Israel and Gaza. We were also very mindful of the ongoing war in Ukraine and the conflict in Armenia and Azerbaijan. It was therefore extremely relevant and an honour, following our meeting, to participate in the Reinhild Traitler Symposium "Women in dialogue for Peace" (29-31 October), organized by EPIL. We had the opportunity to meet who share the same problems, ideas and visions as us. Also, this was the last conference of EPIL. The rich conference program which included workshops, lectures, discussions on the contribution of women in peace dialogue, will inspire and strengthen us in the upcoming meetings.

During the CC meeting young women shared about the Young Women's Strategy (YWS). The CC was very fond of the cooperation and teamwork of the young women and especially the monthly Open Space discussion. It





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was felt this could be an inspiration beyond the Young Women's Strategy and could help us to grow together. We thanked the YWS team for the relentless work they have done already and will surely do in the future.

We were pleased that our podcast team joined us and recorded several interviews with the participants of the symposium. The podcast team's presence at this meeting empowered us to think about creativity and media visibility of our visions, ideas and values.

We considered the place of the EFECW in the wider ecumenical movement and realised we have a special place and opportunity in this dialogue. As part of our meeting we responded to the Conference of European Churches to renew our partnership as CEC develops its witness.

We took our first steps looking at the GA in 2026 and are excited about different possibilities and opportunities.

At the close of our meeting we shared these words to describe our feelings, inspiration, love, sisterhood, refreshed, hope in the future, motivation, lot of work, good memories, good vibes, brighter future, continuity, harmony, beauty in diversity.

During the morning meditation of the EPIL conference we sang these words, they express the hope, we would want to witness in a world of conflict.

*Dark day, dark deeds,  
lost souls long for hope.*

*People knowing only hatred,  
people living without pity.  
People dying without comfort.  
Cry aloud for justice.*

*A candle lit at midnight  
is burning as a protest.  
It whispers to the darkness:  
"I beg to differ."*

*I should like to light a candle.  
I should like to make a difference.  
Though it takes a million candles  
just let one of them be mine.*



EFECW Coordinating Committee – Photo Credit: Zsófi Vincze



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## A three-dimensional approach towards domestic abuse / gender-based violence and the need for change

Workshop during EPIL Conference, October 2023, Vienna

The CC had the honour to participate at the Reinhild Traitler Symposium 'Women in Dialogue for Peace' as a celebration of the ending of EPIL (European Project for Interreligious Learning) from 28 until 31 October 2023 in Vienna.

The first two days of the symposium contained a 'walk & talk' tour in Vienna, an opening ceremony, and an excursion to the Peace University in Castle Schlaining with a guided tour as well as a workshop. The third day started with an input by Sabiha Husic on women as victims of war rape and domestic abuse. Afterwards I had the honour to hold a workshop on the topics of domestic abuse and gender-based violence.



*'Walk & Talk' Tour in Vienna*



*Peace Castle Schlaining*

My workshop was divided into three parts. The first part consisted of an input presentation with some numbers and statistics showing the prevalence of the issue, the seven forms of abuse (psychological, physical, emotional, sexual, digital, financial, social), coercive control, gaslighting, and a video with a female domestic abuse survivor.

For the second part of the workshop the participants were split into three groups. One group exchanged own personal experiences of domestic abuse and/or gender-based violence and their impact on the personal lives and development. The second group worked on the question of how to react when witnessing domestic abuse/gender-based violence and how to create a supportive environment individually and as a society that allows for healing. The third group discussed possibilities for change and collected ideas on how to prevent abuse and violence from happening.





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**Work in groups**



**'River of abuse' with protective 'stepping stones'**

During the third part every group shared an insight of their discussions with all participants. At the end everyone had the opportunity to add more 'stepping stones' as a prevention of and protection from violence and abuse onto the 'river of abuse'- a powerful visualisation that gives hope.



**Final discussion and work on 'stepping stones' for the river of abuse**

It was a great honour and pleasure for me to hold the workshop that was followed by a public panel discussion on 'Women in Dialogue for peace: A feminist view' and our closing celebration/party later on that day.

*Photo credits: pics 1,3,5 Jelena Ljubenović and pics 2,4 Hannah Wehner*

*Hannah Wehner, CC member*



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*#female voices*

## *EFECW Podcast Series*

One of the latest projects of EFECW is a podcast that launched with the title *#femalevoices - a podcast by EFECW* on 9<sup>th</sup> of December 2023, the final evening of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (UN Women). The launch was of course preceded by a number of meetings and discussions, and a fruitful international cooperation, as the members of the podcast team (Agnes Kienesberger, Zsófia Vincze, Mariam Agladze, Jelena Ljubenovic, Hannah Wehner) live in different countries. The idea was to provide a platform through which we can reach more women in order to raise attention to important issues, such as gender-based violence and peaceful cohabitation in ecumenism. The short, 10-15 minutes long recordings are long enough to provide a relevant amount of information, but short enough to keep the audience entertained.



Podcast interview with Martina Heinrichs by Mariam Agladze and Agnes Kienesberger (from right to left)

The recordings were done in October 2023 in Vienna during the joint conference of EPIL and EFECW Coordination Committee meeting. We spent a wonderful couple of days in the centre of this beautiful city and we were pretty busy too: we recorded conversations in advance with Sabiha Husic, Martina Heinrichs, Nicqi





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Ashwood, Stella El Bouayadi-van de Wetering and Emel Topcu, These women attended the last EPIL conference, the European Project of Interreligious Learning, in Magdas Hotel, Vienna, where EFECW members were accommodated as well. The rooms were perfect for recording, and the hotel was also located in a rather quiet part of the city centre.

We asked some of the participants in advance and some at the conference spontaneously, and they all seemed to be very happy to help us and discuss their contribution to the wellbeing of women and society. We had some really interesting and eye-opening conversations with the interviewees. Our first interviewee was Martina Heinrichs, board member of EPIL, who explained how EPIL was realised, its history and impact, also its connection to EFECW. Martina also talked about her own experiences in different organisations. Sabiha Husic, also board member of EPIL, presented to us her professional journey. She is the head of NGO Medica Zenica, an organization from Bosnia and Herzegovina supporting survivors of sexualised wartime violence. She explained the challenges they face and their biggest achievements. In the name of the podcast and social media



**Sabiha Husic**



**Our front podcast ladies**

team I trust I can declare that this has been an amazing opportunity for most of us, in which we learnt more about our fellow women, organizations that can help the survivors of violence and about the contribution to a healthier and more peace-oriented society.

*Zsófia Vincze*

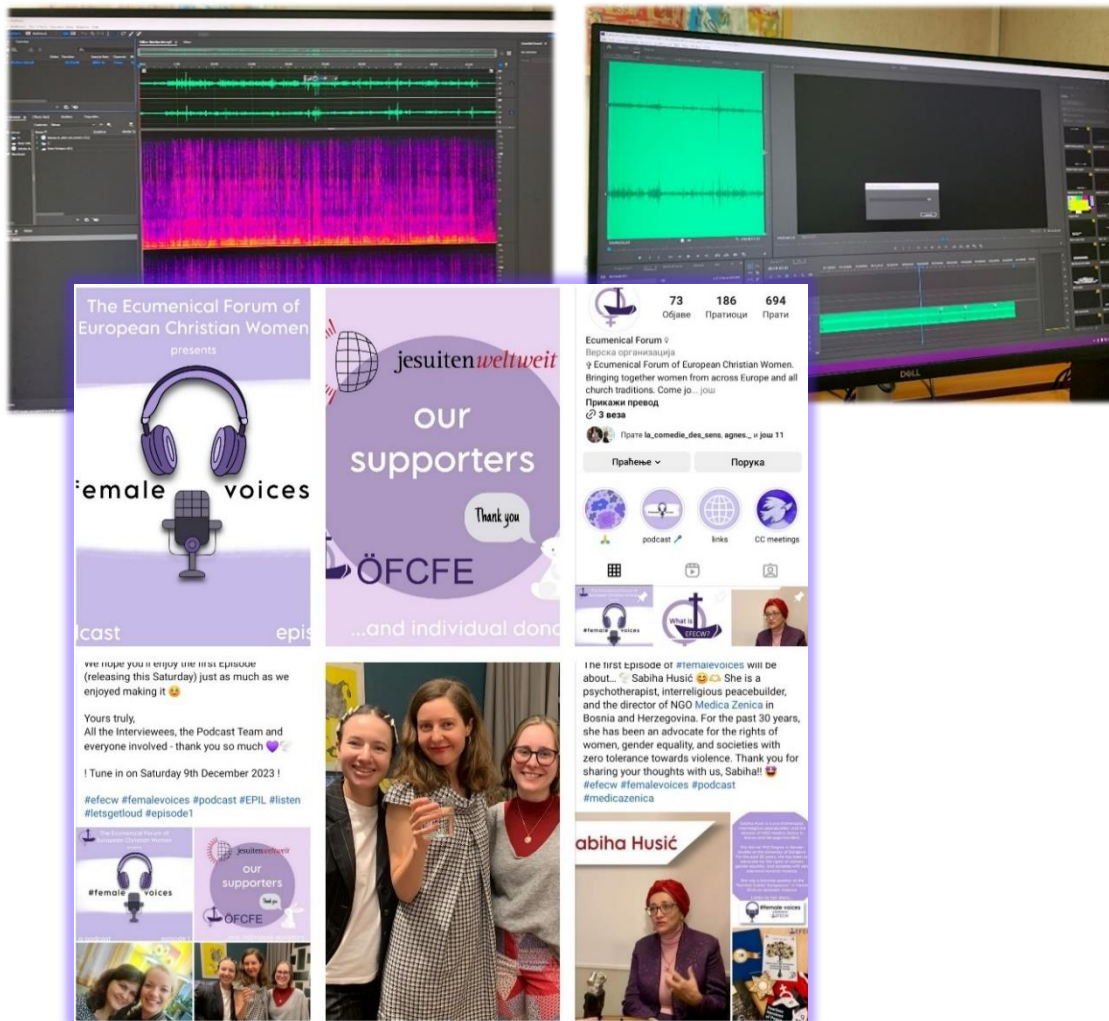
*Photo credits: pic 1 Agnes Kienesberger, pics 2&3 Zsófia Vincze, pic 4 Hannah Wehner*



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## The editing of the first podcast episode



The editing process is inherently engaging that offers a creative exploration. The outcome is entirely within your control, affording the possibility to make thousands of versions from the same source material. This process involves repeated listening of recorded voices, guiding decisions on sequencing and conclusion. It demands a keen awareness as the final product must have a well-structured narrative with a discernible beginning, middle, and end.

*Mariam Agladze, Podcast producer*

*Photo credit: pics 1&2 Mariam Agladze, Pic 3 Agnes Kienesberger*





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## EFECW podcast *#female voices*

### Episodes 1 and 2

Find our podcast on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@EFECW-Podcast> and subscribe, like and share it!!

#### Episode 1

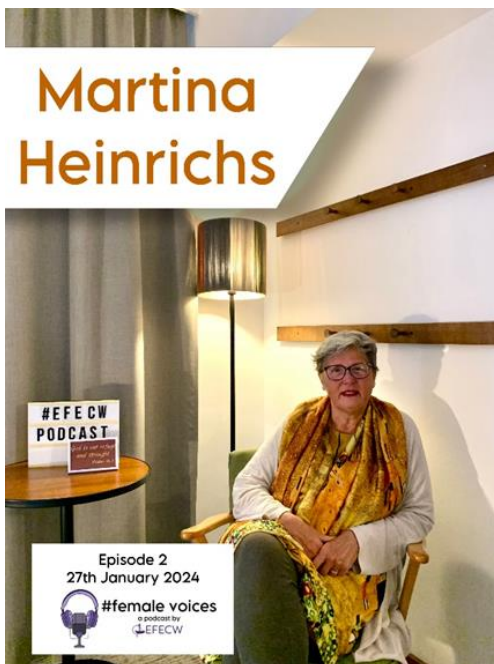
with Sabiha Husic



Sabiha Husić is a psychotherapist, interreligious peacebuilder, and the director of NGO Medica Zenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

She did her PhD Degree in Gender Studies at the University of Sarajevo. For the past 30 years, she has been an advocate for the rights of women, gender equality, and societies with zero tolerance towards violence.

She was a keynote speaker at the "Reinhold Trautler Symposium" in Vienna 2023 on domestic violence.



#### Martina Heinrichs

Martina is a German feminist theologian living in The Netherlands. She is Roman Catholic and studied Catholic theology and French in Bonn und Paris.

From 1983 to 1985 Martina was a research assistant to Professor Catharina Halkes in feminist theology. Then director of studies for feminist theology and ecumenism at two Protestant academies. Before retiring she was the director of studies at the Dominican monastery Huissen, NL. Additionally she co-organised the 1st European Women's Synod in Gmunden, Austria. Involved in the Forum since 1986 – when called by Ruth Epting to give bible studies at the 2nd General Assembly in Järvenpää, Finland.

She was a co-president of EFECW and a board member of EPIL.

#### Episode 2 with Martina Heinrichs



**#female voices**

a podcast by  
EFECW

Social media content created by Agnes Kienesberger



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**WOMEN IN FAITH**

## St Mary Micaela of the Blessed Sacrament

### Foundress of the Sisters of Adorers



Source: [www.adoratrices.com](http://www.adoratrices.com)

Micaela Desmaisières Lopez de Dicastillo y Olmedo, Viscountess of Jorbalán, was born in Madrid on New Year's Day, 1809 during the War of Independence. Three days later she was baptized in the church of Saint Joseph in Madrid's Alcala Street.

The War of Independence forced her mother to leave the Court in Madrid and to flee with her husband and family to France, where Micaela's father and brother Luís died unexpectedly. Under the guidance of the Ursuline sisters of Pau, Micaela received an education consistent with her aristocratic status. Micaela's sister Engracia suffered severe mental illness, and her sister Manuela was forced to go into exile because of her husband's political views.

Micaela was engaged to marry a young nobleman, but the wedding was abruptly canceled the night before over slanderous rumors emanating from Madrid about Micaela's

family. Micaela was profoundly humiliated. Struggling to pursue her spiritual and religious aspirations, while meeting the demands of her social position, Micaela sought the guidance of Fr. Carasa, a Jesuit. Rising early in the morning to pray, receive the Eucharist, and do works of charity, in the evening she frequented the theatre, lectures, and balls.

Micaela's life in Paris and Brussels was a life of outstanding care for the poor. No matter the need, the Viscountess was anxious to provide assistance. The defining moment in Micaela's life occurred after she returned to Madrid and was invited to visit the hospital of St. John of God, where she met prostitutes afflicted with venereal diseases. Micaela had known nothing of the existence of such women, let alone the scorn and abuse to which they were subjected. Profoundly affected by the experience, Micaela set about to establish a shelter for such women. Unfortunately, she met with misunderstanding and rejection at every turn, even from close friends. What was a woman related to the wealthiest and most famous families in Spain thinking? Imagine dedicating herself to caring for prostitutes.

In 1845, Micaela and several companions opened a school to train battered women for gainful employment. In 1850, she moved out of her elegant home and took up lodging in a miserable hovel with women she helped recover their dignity as persons and daughters of God. Once again, Micaela endured severe economic difficulties and slander from every side. Her only comfort lay in the Eucharist, and in 1856, with the help of St.





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Anthony Mary Claret, she founded the Slaves Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament and of Charity<sup>1</sup>. Micaela became Mother Sacramento. On January 6, 1859, the feast of the Epiphany, she and seven companions professed simple vows, and on June 15, 1860, she made her perpetual profession. The growth of the Institute would be slowed.



31<sup>st</sup> General Chapter of the congregation. Source: [www.adoratrices.com](http://www.adoratrices.com)

Archbishop Claret who was Mother Sacramento's confessor, helped her and the fledgling Institute both spiritually and materially. He played an important role in framing the Institute's Constitutions and obtaining their approval. Both saints suffered unspeakable slander in the press.

Micaela's heroic life of charity would have been impossible had she not been blessed with an exceptionally strong character. She

was dogged by slander and suffered attempts on her life. Sometimes, she slept fully dressed, fearing that at any moment the house might be raided. More than once, Micaela stood alone and helpless in a public house to hide or protect a woman in fear of being held against her will.

Micaela ended up lonely, sad, and despised by her friends. Writing to her fellow religious, she said: "Difficult to find another Founder of community that has been accused, maligned and scolded like me. My actions have been judged in the worst way possible." But I could also say like Saint Paul: "Little interest me in what people are saying about me. My judge is God."

In 1865, Spain was hit by a cholera epidemic. Micaela went to Valencia to help and comfort people. In spite of useless pleas and warnings of danger, Micaela surrendered to her fate and died on August 24, 1865, a martyr to charity, realizing what the Eucharist had meant to her: communion with Christ giving his life for the brothers, members of his Body, especially the neediest: the poor, the sick, the weak. At her death, Mother Sacramento's institute numbered seven houses.

In 1922, Pope Pius XI proclaimed Mother Sacramento's heroic virtues. On July 25, 1925, he beatified her, and on March 4, 1934, he canonized her. St. Anthony Mary Claret would be named a patron of the institute she founded.

*Dr. Marianna Apresyan, EFECW Co-President*

<sup>1</sup> Find more information about the congregation: [www.adoratrices.com](http://www.adoratrices.com)



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## Self-Care

### EFECW Young Women Open Space Discussion

It is a natural thing for us to feel stressed, exhausted or overwhelmed sometimes. But when it becomes too often or constant, it is a problem to deal with just as any other. Recognizing ones own emotions and needs is just as important as caring for others, them being your loved ones, pets, plants, etc.

Don't be too hard on yourself, accept that you are not perfect and that you need a break sometimes. Make time for just worrying so you don't drag it through your day. 10 minutes a day could be a start, think about the rationality of your worries. Can you do something about them or are they something incomprehensible? Fix what you can while remembering to let go of the things you can't control. Give those worries to the Lord, he is here for all of us.



Make time for sleeping. Sleeping is beneficial to a healthy body and a healthy mind. Approximately 8 hours a day. If you are having troubles with your sleep, remember to keep your sleeping area clean, tidy, dark and not too warm. Take a shower before bed and don't drink caffeine of anykind (some tea has caffeine too) after 4 p.m. If suffering from nightmares, make time to think about them and break them down. Very often, our subconscious mind is trying to tell us how we're feeling. For example: A dream



where your teeth are falling out, and you are enjoying the feeling of pulling them out is often linked with anxiety or losing touch with loved ones.

Our mind is closely connected to our body. When we are feeling sad our bodies tends to curl up under a blanket. If we are happy we tend to dance, move, etc. So if we replace our bodily reactions when sad from curling up to moving, exercising, dancing, our mind tends to switch from sad to happy as well. Focusing on fundamentals like breathing exercises, puts us back at ease from stressful situations. So just remember body-mind connections!

Act with yourself just as you would with your child or pet. Remember to feed, clean and compliment yourself. The best person to take care of you is YOU. Finally, don't forget that God is here to hear your cries so keeping him updated on your wellbeing and giving him all your worries keeps a fruitfull relationship with him! Just because your worries seem small compared to worldly problems doesn't mean that they are less worthy of understanding. What is hard for you, hits God too. For example, if one family member gets sick, everybody worries about them. God is your heavenly parent so keep him updated! And then when you practice these good habits you will also be well rested and replenished to help your loved ones too. 😊

Helena Slacanac

Photo credit: pic.1 Carrollton Rainbow Inc.; pic 2. Jelena Ljubenović





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## Trauma, trauma-related aspects, and trauma healing

### EFECW Young Women Open Space

Another Open Space Discussion was held on Sunday, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2023. That session's topic was *'Trauma, trauma related aspects, and trauma healing'*. Hannah held a presentation on Adverse Childhood Experiences, the central nervous system, trauma (understanding trauma, trauma responses, consequences of unhealed trauma, and trauma healing), and our own support map.

We did a deep dive into the Central Nervous System and learned the following: The autonomic nervous system is responsible for a lot of processes and automatic functions in our body, for example blood pressure, how we feel stress and digestion. In nature it is alerted in life-or-death situations. It builds a memory and will send signals when we encounter dangerous situations.

When we experience trauma or chronic stress this system will cease to function in a healthy way. It will turn seemingly normal situations (often through a trigger) into states of survival. The autonomic nervous system and the body react with panic, anxiety, anger or dissociation.

This dysregulation will therefore put the body in alarm modes in otherwise safe situations, which strains it further and decreases resilience. It's a vicious circle and to escape it, you have to put yourself into a more supportive or safer setting. Whether you find one or create one, you may realize it's no easy job. I find it very important to not walk this road alone.

“ Being traumatized means continuing to organize your life as if the trauma were still going on – unchanged and immutable – as every new encounter or event is contaminated by the past ”

Bessel van der Kolk

*Unhealed trauma will have you throwing away healthy connections with people who are actually in your corner.*

*Unhealed trauma is behind our health, weight, addiction, sleep, and relationship issues.*

By developing tools to reflect and recognising signs of potential trauma we can build a peaceful world. I find education in this topic needs to be done very thoroughly and am grateful for this insight!

It was a pleasure to join the Open Space Discussion on Trauma and for all the young or new women to the forum: I really recommend participating!

*Agnes Kienesberger, EFECW Social Media Manager, Student of Veterinary Medicine*



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## Healing for Living

### Project of the Armenian Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women

2023 was a hard year for the Armenian people. After eleven months of blockade of Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh, 120,000 Armenians left their homeland and got refuge in Armenia because of the ethnic cleansing by Azerbaijan.



The Armenian forum in partnership with 'Kom over en help' organization started the "Healing for Living" project. Within this project, the Armenian forum organized Trauma Healing trainings to prepare the volunteers and people from different churches in Armenia to help displaced people from war.

The Armenian forum works with women and children displaced from Nagorno Karabakh and organizes medical and psychological support for deeply traumatized people. The forum visits the villages and does gynecological observations (external and internal examinations and Pap smears), and pediatric and cardiological consultations.

We will continue to assist our Armenian sisters to get comfort and new hope.

*Text and Photo Credit: Marianna Apresyan, EFECW Co-President*





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## Trauma Healing

A publication of the American Bible Society

The publication we use as a basis for this training is intended for professionals, and not only, who are ready to support and help fellow human beings with a damaged soul, such as pastors, but also community members. It was published by the American Bible Society in 2015, under the auspices of the Trauma Healing Institute of America.



The Trauma Healing Institute is an American Bible Society ministry. The Trauma Healing Institute, American Bible Society has been getting God's Word into people's hands and hearts around the world for more than 200 years. They want to make the Bible available to every person in a language and format that each can understand and afford, so all people may experience its life-changing message.

Trauma Healing Institute mission is to help the Church address the effects of trauma and loss with resources that integrate biblical and mental health principles.

The book presents and encourages to practice the classic methods of trauma healing.

We learn about the arc of trauma healing. It looks like this:

The occurrence of distress, formulating and pronouncing the suffering, being listened to, crying, explaining, arriving under the cross of Christ, forgiveness, letting go, starting anew, getting stronger and continuing life on new foundation!



When a person suffers some kind of pain, loss, it is actually the heart, the soul that is damaged. And it must be healed, nurtured! It must not be left in a state of suffering. This healing, nurturing, caring process also involves the person who is hurting, who has experienced loss, who has experienced pain, finding someone to stand in front of, to listen to, to take an interest in, to guide, without causing more pain.



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A suffering person must be shown that he or she does have to face suffering, to accept it, but at the same time be prepared and helped to mourn it, to endure it, to weep it away and to begin the process of spiritual healing. All this must be done before God, in the Word of God, under the cross of Christ. For, as godly people, we know that the wholeness of the soul, the healthy rebuilding of life, can only begin after we have experienced the absolution and healing that Christ has given us.



Within the 6 chapters of Healing our traumas, we will explore the following content and practices:

1. If God loves man, why does he allow suffering?
2. How can spiritual wounds be healed?
3. What happens when someone mourns a painful event?
4. Let us bring our pain to the cross of Christ!
5. What is forgiveness?
6. Reconciliation.

We trust that the results will be visible and tangible in the lives and attitudes of those who participate in this training. If a pastor or church member returns to the field of ministry with a different perspective, for example, a different view of a bereaved or suffering person, it will have been worthwhile.



*Text and Photo Credit: Judit Vincze, Reformed Pastor - Spiritual Care, EFECW CC Member*





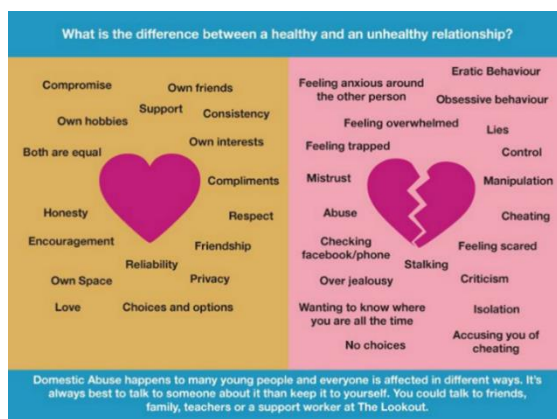
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## The difference between healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships

### EFECW Young Women Open Space Discussion

During the summer of 2023, an inspiring project commenced: Open Space Discussion for Young Women, a monthly online program for young females who wish to learn and also teach through personal experience. Over the past six months, we have covered topics such as love and abuse in relationships, trauma and healing, as well as self-care. The leaders Hannah and Jelena organize the events in an utmost professional way: they send out the invitations and prepare quality materials beforehand, which the attendees, who are all open-minded and respectful of each other, receive at the end of each session.



At the beginning of each session, we give a brief update and introduction on ourselves in case there are new faces. We proceed with the basic guidelines of the program, which includes discretion and respect. The topic for September was the differences between healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships. During the event of the month, we learnt about the way one can differentiate between healthy and unhealthy relationships: there are some keywords that must be considered in terms of a good relationship like autonomy, equality, privacy; the antidotes thereof signal that there is something wrong. We got to learn the six/seven forms of abuse, as there are types that are inherent in our modern world, such as financial and digital abuse. The speaker Hannah presented the profile of an abuser that showed us the signs of potential danger in the relationship. After discussing the negativities of relationships, we learnt what exactly a healthy relationship looks like. At the end of the presentation, we always have the chance to reflect on whatever we heard. Everyone is welcome to share experiences and advice, but merely listening is also an option.

There are many more topics that the attendees suggested and that we would like to process. We are happy to meet online on a monthly basis and we are thankful for our little community. Here's to many more successful Open Space sessions!

Zsófia Vincze

Photo credits: 1) <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/EiRZK-9UcAE-jJ8.jpg>

2) <https://teenage-resource.middletownautism.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2016/09/healthy-relationship.png>



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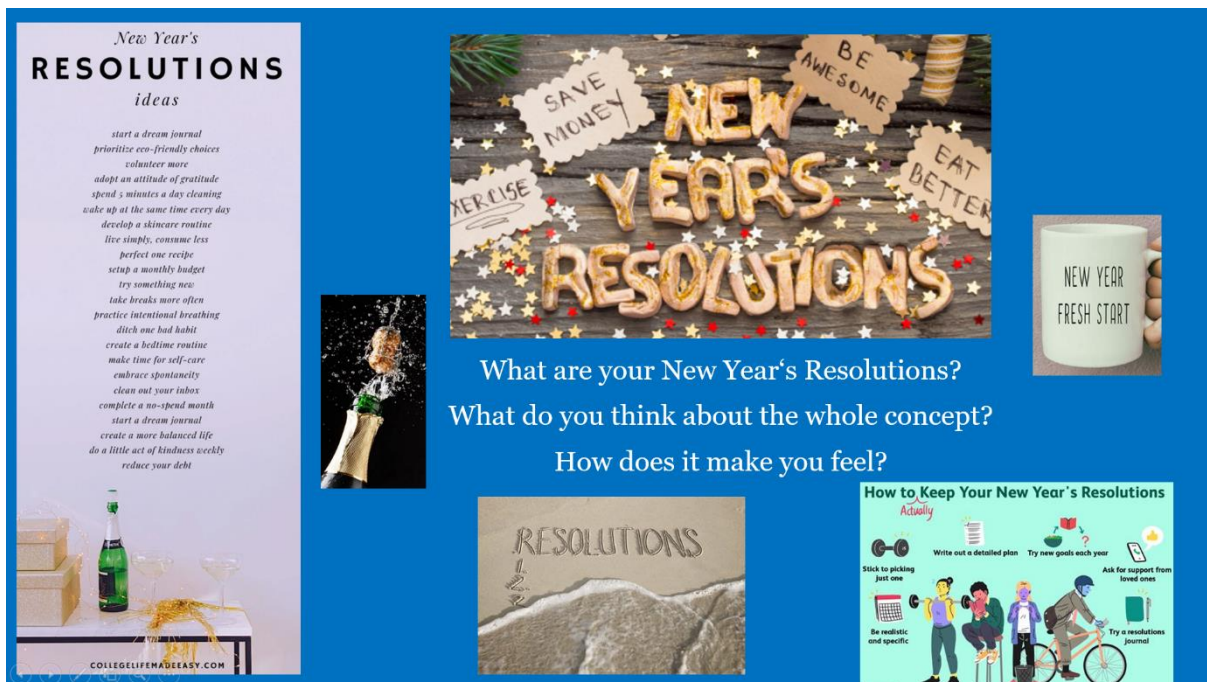
## A moment for reflection

“The only journey is the one within...”<sup>2</sup>

On January 28, the first Open Space Discussion in 2024 was held, where the panel featured a very attractive topic entitled “A Moment for Reflection”. The participants had a great opportunity to share their impressions about the New Year’s Eve, the Christmas celebration, the post – holiday feelings, New Year’s resolutions etc. It is a fact that feelings of sadness or disappointment after the holidays aren’t uncommon, but it is important to pay attention to how long those feelings last. Though the concept of post – holiday feelings hasn’t been analyzed much, the feelings are still a fairly common occurrence. People may have troubles with the holidays themselves – difficult family dynamics, reminders of lost loved ones, financial situations, the grand expectations etc. For others connecting with friends and family, scheduling activities in advance, and maintaining healthy habits could create positive effects to their lives on a personal and professional level. Therefore, **self – reflection leads to self – discovery, guiding us towards personal growth and a deeper understanding of ourselves.** We concluded that it is important to learn from the past, but that our focus should be directed towards the future.

If you are reading this text and you are suffering from post – holiday emotions, please do not forget that you are not alone, and we wish for you to quickly restore your energy and healthy habits.

Jelena Ljubenović, EFECW CC member



*Photo credit: Slide of the power-point-presentation, created by Hannah Wehner*

<sup>2</sup> R. M. Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet (1929)





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## Neighbourhood meeting in Oradea

On the initiative of Judit Vincze and the Forum Romania, from 29th June till 1st July 2023 the National Coordinators of Ukraine and Croatia managed to answer the invitation and join in a fruitful exchange with the Romanian forum.

Oradea is a beautiful historical city with a long and turbulent history visible in numerous congregations and churches, together with a multinational community whose members equally speak the Romanian as well as the Hungarian language. The communication of the meeting was English, so not much random mingling was possible but a small number of sisters.

We felt warmly welcomed and visited the project 'Léleksmink' (Soul Make-Up) currently going on. The issue, we dealt with, was to encourage women to take up some exercise to keep their body healthy with a healthy soul inside it. The biblical text we used was Psalm 130. As for many decades only the spiritual aspect of faith was nourished, nowadays we become more and more aware that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit so it is not right to neglect it as it is the mirror of our soul. Women were encouraged to try anything: from strolling around the neighbourhood, dance, swim to jogging, hiking or going to the gym. Just get out of the house!



In Oradea, sister Miorita, despite her age (in her 90s) remains an active member of the Forum. As a former participant at the Olympics, she incorporates an example of a lively old lady keeping herself on the move and showing a healthy spirit in a healthy upright body. So let us decide to start walking regularly at least!

The next day the members of the Romanian Forum sat together with the representatives of the Ukrainian and Croatian Forum and we had some personal exchange and presentation of all our activities in the light of *"How to refresh activities after the pandemic"*. Most forums struggle with lack of young women. We parted in sisterly hugs and determination to stay in neighbourhood touch. Hopefully, the next gathering will be in Croatia.

*Text and Photo credit: Judit Vincze, Romania NC, EFECW CC Member*



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## The role of women in peace-making: on the steps of Abigail

Neighbourhood meeting, 21-24 September 2024, Armenia

The Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women in Armenia organised a neighbourhood meeting of Russian-speaking forums in Armenia. The meeting was held from 21<sup>st</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> September 2023. This meeting gathered women from Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Russia, and Ukraine and helped them to find examples of peace-making in complicated or war situations in the Bible. We organised this project based on Abigail's example (1 Sam. 25: 3-26) when she stopped the blood guilt with her strength and wisdom. During the meeting, the role of women in peace-making was underlined and developed. Different approaches and experiences from participants in this field were also discussed. This meeting was especially important for participants from

*'The Lord has restrained you from blood-guilt and from taking vengeance with your own hand' 1 Sam. 25:26*

Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia, as it was a big step forward in talking openly about their pain, as well as listening and understanding each other. The Armenian forum, which is living through a hard period, created a third space for participant women to speak out about their problems and keep confidentiality, to meet and talk about peace and reconciliation, and to take their first step in reconciliation. Through this meeting,

we are following the main goal of Routh Epting by moving from Division to Vision.

*"Sirens and sad news every day in our country... Smiles, support, and sun – at the neighbourhood meeting in Armenia. It's like a gasp of fresh air!!!*

*We sang and cried together... Armenian sisters were extremely welcoming, and the support of all participants there was priceless for us during this difficult period. These meetings are very important for all women around Europe – for our present and especially for the future."*

*Natalia Horbal, Ukraine*



*"The meeting went without a hitch! A good, mutually understanding atmosphere reigned. The forum made me once again understand and accept that a woman, through kindness and wisdom, can achieve the resolution of great conflicts and problems, and that our main goal is for women from Christian countries to be in unity, be in solidarity, and avoid blood guilt! Thanks to the organisers of this project and all participants for their trust and their stories!"*

*Ruzanna Hamayakyan, Russia*





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*"It was a very interesting and effective meeting for us. We experienced such touching moments while listening to different dramatic stories from our sisters. This meeting and the presentations about countries' situations and women's activities in the Church and societies were very informative and important".*

*Nino Agladze, Georgia*

*"Now I'm returning home very impressed by this meeting. I think that such kind of meetings are very important*

*for developing dialogues about the peace between not only fighting countries' representatives but also between women living hard times in general."*

*Nino Akhmeteli, Georgia*

*"The power of women is that we can unite, regardless of politics and differences in our countries. Such meetings are necessary; they give strength for life in a modern cruel society. We have learned to listen to others and be heard - this is the most valuable thing."*

*"During the meeting, I felt Freedom - I could talk freely about my pains, feelings, and situation. Love and care from the whole Armenian forum, and*

*Hope that thanks to common actions and common prayers we will be able to survive difficult times. Neighbourhood meetings are needed!!! They give strength to overcome difficulties together."*



*Women from Belarus*

*Photo credit: Ani Sukiasyan / Text: Dr. Marianna Apresyan, EFECW Co-President*





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## About Peace

Almost every day I am afraid to listen to or read the news. There are a lot of cruel conflicts or wars. It is not easy to live in this reality around all of us. We need faith and hope, just to hear about different conflicts, and to live it we really need strong spirit and faith in action.

Very often we talk about getting ourselves "in" or/and "out" of messes, problems and all different kind of conflict "situations". We try to figure out "where we are" (or the others) on a conflict issue. Deep conflicts are stressful and painful and, at worst, are violent and destructive. In conflicts, more than in any other human experience, we see ourselves and the others in new and profound ways, and we seek to restore truth and love (firstly) in ourselves. If we take care to look beyond the words and the issues, we seek and see God.

Is there a time when peace will reign before us? However, in order for peace to reign, one must first reconcile, not just keep quiet. There is no peace if we do not make peace with the person next to us. This is how a peaceful conscience is first acquired, which is the first step in building peace through relationships of respect and acceptance. For a peaceful and orderly life, along with many material goods, it is necessary to distinguish good from evil. And resolutely pursue good and avoid evil.



Ultimately, reconciliation is a journey toward and through conflict. God does not promise that He will take care of everything, but He promises to accompany us. Do we recognize that promise?

*Photo credit: EFECW*

*Marijana Ajzenkol, EFECW Co-President*





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## Environmental Commitment EFECW 2022-2026

The message from the IX General Assembly in Strasbourg committed the Forum to act, 'For the care of the environment and the promotion of climate justice.' The issues of climate change, wider environmental challenges and their impact on people and communities has long been a key concern of members of the EFECW. There is increasing urgency from many churches to take action on climate concerns. I feel members of the Forum are keenly aware of the responsibilities to future generations and the importance that we all take responsibility.

Some of the strongest voices in the climate emergency have been young women, most notably Greta Thunberg. Her voice has been supported and amplified in the UK by a much older person, BBC presenter and naturalist, David Attenborough who is 97. There is learning for us here – the very old listening to the passion of the very young and advocating for change. We are women of many ages in the forum, we need to be bringing our collective wisdom to this issue. But we must take our lead from younger women, listening to and supporting their voices.

As Christian women looking at the climate crisis we are able to consider the interconnectedness between gender, spirituality, and environmental justice. Part of our role is to demonstrate the importance of recognising and addressing the unique vulnerabilities and contributions of women in the face of climate change. This is not only from our European perspective but also looking globally acknowledging that women, particularly in marginalised communities, often bear the disproportionate burden of environmental degradation and its consequences. Viewpoint may draw parallels between the exploitation of women and the exploitation of the Earth, emphasising the need for a holistic and intersectional approach to environmental activism. We gain a deeper understanding of the ethical dimensions of environmental stewardship and a more inclusive framework for advocating sustainable and just solutions that empower women and safeguard the planet.

Ahead of the next General Assembly we will be finding ways to bring women together to engage in these issues. We plan online discussions, input from leading voices and collaborative projects. We hope to generate short essays, ideas for activity and activism, campaign resources including social media content and prayer resources and podcast material.

The outcomes we are seeking at for forum members and other Christian women to learn about and engage with the issue of climate justice and theological thinking. For Christian women to be empowered to take leadership roles in climate justice efforts and engage with policymakers on these issues.

If you are interested in any aspects of this work, please contact **Anthea Sully** ([info@efecw.net](mailto:info@efecw.net)). If you know any women who are active in this field, please reach out to them to see if they would like to be involved.



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## Announcements

### Save the Date: 15<sup>th</sup> May 2024 - National Coordinators' Online Meeting

***Give me now wisdom and knowledge*** (2Chron 1:10)

We are looking forward being together with National Coordinators and talk about renewal of our Forum.

EFECW is a mosaic made by pieces of national forums. In order to have a beautiful picture, we need your contribution by filling out the questionnaire that you received. It will help us to learn about/update each other, but also to think about the future vision and renewal.

Save the date **15<sup>th</sup> May 2024 at 7pm (CET)**, get a drink or refreshment and prepare for 2,5 hours of great time, where we will share our thoughts, ideas, dilemmas and everything else which is needed for mutual understanding and work on the future steps of EFECW .

Since the NC meeting is a business meeting and all NCs are delegates with voting rights, we kindly ask you that if one cannot participate she could delegate someone else.

Our meetings are like bricks for the building: The nicer the bricks we have, the more beautiful building we will construct!

**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>)

**Bank details:**

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