

NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2024



God, one day we will meet
and You will ask me what I did in
my life,

how much I loved and how much did I rejoice with my neighbors?

Will You accuse me then?

Help me now to build bridges and tear down the walls that separate.

In Your mercy and love,

erase my mistakes and admonish me not to repeat them

My body and soul are all I have in this life

help me by Your grace to use them for Your celebration

and for the benefit and service of my neighbors

as I gratefully walk on this earth in Jesus' name

Amen

Photo credit: Saša Montiljo / Prayer: Marijana Ajzenkol

National Coordinators' meeting 2024

Online, 15th May 2024

Around 30 women from different Forums and countries met online to, listen, vote, talk, and pray together, for almost three hours. This was a new way of having a business meeting for the Forum. One of the outcomes from the General Assembly in 2022 is to work for inclusion and renewal. The narrative and financial reports for 2022 and 2023 were approved. Future plans were presented concerning the Young Women's activities, a workshop on encouraging female leadership, a working group on EFECW commitments for environmental issues as well as ordinary activities such as the online National Coordinators' (business) meeting 2025, Online National Coordinators' (business) meeting 2026, Podcasts and Newsletter 2-3 times a year. Changes in the constitution were presented for further reflection, discussion (to be adopted at the next GA) to include individual membership together with National Forums. These changes will be sent to the National Forums to be discussed further in the online National Coordinators business meeting in 2025 and 2026.



Out of the answers, concerns, and reflections from the questionnaire sent earlier (December 2023) to the National Forums, we talked in four groups about: (a) communication, (b) ecumenism and women's issues, (c) representation work and (d) finances and membership. All the four groups also reflected about the perspective of renewal. One common challenge is the post Covid-pandemic situation we are facing. Nevertheless, there is a need of working be steadfast in communicating among us both online and by meeting physically, despite financial constraints. We need to nurture bringing more young women and women on board, while working towards more events, more funding opportunities, more physical meetings and, finally, maintain representation work at national level, increase representation at national and European, even

global level through stronger cooperations (WCC, EYCE, CEC), cooperations with educational institutions as universities (connection with young people), etc.



Furthermore, it is important to renew our understanding of ecumenism today. Ecumenical education is therefore important. Ecumenism and feminism are grounded in peace and love. Two of EFECW's important pillars from the very beginning. How can the Forum renew itself to meet the challenges of understanding ecumenism and women's role today?



We prayed together with embodiment of the light, water, and flower:

"Father, as we close this meeting, fill us with hope and encouragement for the days ahead. May the discussions we've had today ignite a passion within us to make a positive difference. Strengthen our resolve to face challenges with optimism and to work diligently towards our goals. Let Your light, life guide us in all our endeavours. Guide us in that way, that we ask you for wisdom! Amen."

Carin Gardbring, EFECW Co-president



EFECW Podcast #female voices

Episodes 3-6



Stella El-Buoyadi-Van de Wetering is a professor of Arabic language and Islamic culture, originally from the Netherlands. Stella is an advocate of interreligious initiatives and ecumenism, also member of EPIL. She volunteered in Muslim families who came to the Netherlands, which gave her the opportunity to improve her Arabic and lead her on this path. Stella is the author of the book Reaching for the Sky: Religious Education from Christian and Islamic Perspectives, which was published in 2012.





Emel Topçu is a professor of social and political sciences from Turkey. She has taught at several different universities and has lived in many different countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany and India, becoming a professional of migration and interculturality. She has a broad view of cultural differences and a sensibility towards people. Emel is now helping Syrian refugees in Turkey, she encourages intercultural and interreligious dialogue and peace making.





EFECW

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



Nicqi Ashwood is a reverend of the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, a teacher, mission partner and gender equity advocate. She graduated at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute and Eden Theological Seminary in the USA. She is actively working against domestic and gender-based violence, sexual abuse and human trafficking. She passionately fights for equal rights and the respect for human rights. Nicqi has been member of several organizations and is currently working for the World Council of Churches that deal with these very serious issues worldwide.



#female voices

EFECW

EFECW

Female drug addiction and sex work often root back to unhealed experiences of sexual abuse and violence especially during childhood.



Rev. Nicqi Ashwood, #femalevoices Episode 6



Call for podcast proposals!

Do you have any proposals, wishes or ideas for future podcast episodes?

If so, let us know so that we can be in touch to discuss your ideas: info@efecw.net

Social media content created by Agnes Kienesberger



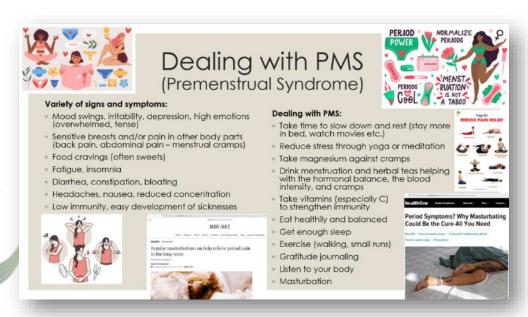
YOUNG WOMEN: OPEN SPACE DISCUSSION

'Listen to your heart, trust your gut, and use your head'

On February 25, we held our second Open Space discussion for young women in 2024. The topic was again self-care, covering healthy boundaries, the gut feeling and intuition, PMS (Pre-Menstrual Syndrome), and self-pleasure.

Especially as women, most of us experience regular disrespect and crossing of personal boundaries in public and/or private. Therefore, knowing what healthy boundaries are and how to set and maintain them as a foundation for healthy, respectful encounters and relationships of all kinds is extremely important. There are different types of boundaries, including physical, intellectual, emotional, sexual, material, and time boundaries. Finding the right balance between porous and rigid boundaries to establish healthy, well-balanced ones can be difficult at times but becomes easier with practice.

In our societies we often learn to take decisions with our mind. Widening the approach by adding and also listening to the own body-inherent intelligence in the form of the intuition and the gut feeling can be helpful in decision taking processes. Being in touch with the own body and gut feeling also helps to feel more complete and in peace with oneself.



Talking openly about menstruation and the experiences women have with it, is still something that is in many contexts a taboo. But given that half of the world's population goes through the experience monthly for a huge part of their lives, it really should not be the case. Experiencing

menstruation and the premenstrual syndrome can be stressful and painful. If then the ability to talk about it and have conversations is not given, it adds even more to the distress. Whereas, if we open room for exchange and discussion and support each other in the various experiences we have, it not only eases the experience itself but also shows that the difficulties we may have are extremely common. Therefore, we offered a room for exchange and discussion with our Open Space and enjoyed a vivid and input-rich conversation about menstruation and PMS.

The topics of self-pleasure/masturbation and female pleasure are even more taboo than talking about menstruation. A lack of open discussions and knowledge transfer can lead to wrong decisions and sexually unhealthy encounters. If we encourage to talk openly without shame or blame in informative and educative ways about the female body and pleasure, as it is more commonly done for men, we can empower especially young women to help them know where to set the bar and boundaries for shared experiences with a partner and encourage them to know and embrace themselves before embarking on shared journeys, which together can lead to healthier sexual relationships and better decisions.



The Open Space Discussions offer a room for us to talk about and discuss these topics of importance in a respectful way that might otherwise not be discussed at all. Having established this safe space that offers support, trust, and empowerment is something that I am extremely grateful for and proud of.

Hannah Wehner, EFECW CC member

Self-esteem, emotional intelligence, and assertive communication

The EFECW young women's meeting is continuing its wide range of discussion topics and providing a really one-of-a-kind space. Hannah and Jelena never fail to find a topic that hits home!

This week, we began with a reminder of self-esteem and self-compassion. Low self-esteem can lead to destructive relationships and a loss of potential, and too much self-esteem can lead to arrogance and over-exaggeration. Healthy self-esteem leads to positive relationships, learning, accepting and growing with feedback.

We then discussed different communication styles (non-assertive, aggressive, assertive) and the goals and pitfalls associated with each. Non-assertive communication, for example, is avoidant and self-denying. Aggressive communication can be disrespectful to others and be more concerned about being right than kind.



Photo credit: ThinkPsych.com

Assertive communication, in the best sense, is the healthiest option: it is respectful and empathetic to both oneself and others. Hannah and Jelena then reminded us about the importance of saying 'no' and that it's not selfish to do so. All of us agreed that we can find ourselves trying to people-please too often.

As usual, the session began with a presentation and then was opened up for us to share our thoughts and experiences and support one another.





This meeting and its topics helped me to bring my focus back to things that matter. Thanks Hannah and Jelena for another great discussion and I look forward to many more!

Florence Butterfield¹

¹ Pictures are slides of a presentation prepared by Hannah Wehner

Attachment styles and consent

On 20 April, a group of young women met online for their regular Open Space session. The meeting, per usual, was moderated by Hannah and Jelena, who have been heartily organizing the Open Space events since the beginning. The topic of the April session was attachment styles and consent, one that cannot be discussed and emphasized enough in our society. The session started with a short introduction and update circle of all the participants, which was followed by the repetition of a set of rules that apply to the whole extent of the meeting. There is always an agenda, which reveals what interesting topics the participants are about to listen to.



The organizers shared some very useful online tests that help us define what attachment styles we have, followed by a presentation about each attachment style in detail. We then learnt about the concept of consent with the help of slides, pictures and a video. We learnt how many things there are that can be misinterpreted as consent and how countries have different legislations concerning consent. At the end of each session, we have time to discuss what we heard and to add our own ideas, sharing experiences or thoughts. This time was no different: in our little safe space, we led a fruitful discussion together. I hereby would like to express my gratitude towards the organizers for the valuable work they put into the Open Space sessions!

Zsófia Vincze²

² Pictures are slides of a presentation prepared by Hannah Wehner

Self-talk and positive affirmations

"Each day is the field of brightness where the invitation of our life unfolds."

John O'Donohue, from Benedictus:
A Book of Blessings

The May topic of our Open Space Discussion was related to Self-talk and positive affirmations. From very instructive materials, i.e. through the presentation prepared by Hannah, we were introduced to the importance of practicing positive self-talk, the self-talk and self-esteem cycles and affirmations from different perspectives. On this

occasion, we also received an interesting exercise until the next time, which is to observe ourselves 24 hours a day and pay attention to our thoughts, and if negative ones appear, to immediately replace them with positive and strong thoughts. In a very fruitful discussion section, we shared our opinions and experiences regarding these topics. Our participants enrich our Open Space Discussions and we are very grateful to them for wanting to get involved in an informal way of education and sharing under the auspices of EFECW.

Affirmations – further examples

Current Reality: Bad body image
Vision: Positive body image

Affirmation:
I love my body as it is, and I am beautiful the way I am.

Current Reality: Difficulties in taking accountability and responsibility

Vision: Ability to take accountability and responsibility

Affirmation:
I am fully accountable and responsible for the results of my decisions and actions.

Jelena Ljubenović, EFECW CC member³



³ Pictures are slides of a presentation prepared by Hannah Wehner



NEWS FROM THE MEMBERS

Women's power is in unity

10th anniversary of the Armenian Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women

This year, on 23rd March, we marked the tenth anniversary of the Christian Women's Forum in our country. On that day there was a meeting attended by the women of the forum who for ten years worked tirelessly together, humbly serving Christ.



Women from different churches were present that day, and each of them presented their mission. Ten years may not be enough for history, but in the past decade, these dedicated women have carried out a huge amount of work in women's empowerment, integration in society, active role, and health care.

Doctors, psychologists, and theologians have unitedly contributed to the healthy and virtuous lifestyle of women in our country. Recently, after the tragic occupation of Nagorno Karabakh and the ethnic cleansings of Armenians from their homeland, the Forum has worked with displaced people from Nagorno Karabakh implementing the 'Trauma Healing' project that included psychological and medical support by the inter-disciplinary group of professionals, members of the Armenian forum (psychologists, social workers, medical doctors, gynaecologists, paediatricians, cardiologist, etc).

The Forum did not deviate from its goals: it always brought its benefits to Armenian women through trauma healing, leading/organising group or individual therapy, organising distribution of children food, medicines, food, and even Bible distribution.



Whenever you think of the presence of all the diverse women who are part of this forum and the service they have rendered, the differences of affiliation immediately disappear and the commonality in the mission undertaken by human beings is outlined. Individuals are identified by their purposefulness, spirit of service, care for others, and zeal for the sake of society.

This is the fullness and beauty of ten years of godly and human virtue.

Photo credit: Armenian EFCW

Text by Syuzanna Sargsyan (a psychologist,

member of the Armenian forum)



Child abuse: we react and we hope

2-day conference organised by the Greek Forum "Damaris"



On Friday 1st and Saturday 2nd December 2023, the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women "Damaris the Athenean", the Municipality of Athens and the General Secretariat of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Education organised an extremely important Conference on the subject of child abuse.

On December 1st, the 230 students who participated and the 20 teachers who accompanied them, were divided into workshops, in each of which, students from 3-4 different schools participated, aiming at allowing students to meet and encounter their peers and thus be able to exchange opinions and experiences.

The pedagogical workshop: "I know my limits and how to protect myself and others", based on theatre aimed to strengthen and cultivate sexual abuse prevention skills in children and adolescents. Main topics discussed: definition & forms of sexual abuse; the concept of gender-based violence; Study of concepts such as consent, privacy, safe boundaries and relationships.



On the second day, in 3 different sessions, speakers touched upon the subject and shared their knowledge and expertise (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24dxHPTYAjA).

Session 1: "Mind the child... Detecting the problem through the eyes of children"

Dr. Electra Koutsoukou on the topic: "Management of an incident of child abuse by the teacher: a legal approach"

Dr. Georgios Nicolaidis on the topic: "The experience of the child victim of abuse-neglect from the perspective of the first person in today's Greece", and

Dr. Ilias Liamis on the topic: "Teaching the wounded".

Session 2: "Defend the Child: From Touching the Wounds to Creating Healing Methods"

Sociologist Raimon Novell and Educator Llorenc Claramunt Goya: "The Voice of Children in Safeguarding: New challenges and tools for creating spaces for the protection of children in a Christian Educational context" and



MSc Nurse Elissavet Damaskopoulou on "The effects of abuse on children growing up in an institutional environment and the influence of caregivers on their development"



Session 3 – Round Table: "...Because if the child is saved, there is Hope..."

Fr. Antonios Kalligeris, Fr. Markos Foskolos, Reverend Georgios Adam, Ms. Elissavet Damaskopoulou, Mr. Raimon Novell, Mr. Georgios Giannakidis and Mr. Kostas Giannopoulos.

Photo and Text credit: Damaris the Athenian

A call to prayer for peace

A message from the French group of EFECW

The brutal attack by Hamas on 7 October 2023 came as a real surprise. The Israeli services, however powerful, had not detected the preparations. The taking of large numbers of hostages and the appalling massacre of Jewish communities in several places of worship and a festive gathering place provoked an immediate response from the Israeli Government. The response was extremely violent, and since then the Israeli army and air force have not stopped crushing the tiny territory that is the 'Gaza Strip'. It's a new war, ruthless in its turn, causing the death of a large number of civilians, a high percentage of whom are women and children...

We, members of a group from the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women, asked ourselves what we could do.

It soon became clear that there was nothing we could do except pray. We wanted to make this clear, especially to those for whom we pray. We don't want to limit our prayers to intercession only for the Christians in this region where the three monotheistic religions are deeply intertwined, but we pray for all those who are suffering, especially the women who are crying. However, it is to Christian women that we wanted to give priority.

Below is the text that the Strasbourg group and the Paris group managed to compose together, despite the diversity of our opinions.

Then the difficulty arose in obtaining the addresses of the many and varied associations, churches and institutions to which we could send our message. Then, during the Advent period, we sent this message of support, in English and French, to a large number of organisations in Israel and Palestine.

There was little response, and that's to be expected for security reasons, but it's vital that we don't stop praying.

Each of us has pledged to pray, wherever we are, every Thursday at midday for peace to return to the Middle East.

We invite you, if you want, to do the same and join in this prayer every Thursday.

Laure HOEFFEL et Marjolaine CHEVALLIER

It is as women and as Christians that we address you, Christian women who live where Christ lived.

We are deeply upset by the horrors endured on both sides in this new conflict which has already made too many victims.

How long will there be so much injustice and so much hatred?

The principal victims of these intolerable acts are mainly the most vulnerable ones: women, children and elderly people.



In the dramatic situation that you are going through, we would like to express our support and our solidarity.

Be assured of our deepest sympathy.

We are praying wholeheartedly with you and for you, our sisters in Jesus-Christ. We are also praying for all the women of this region who suffer and cry.

With all the men and women who work for peace, we press for the end of this terrible war as soon as possible.

Only true justice will allow all the men and women to live in peace in this Biblical country.

During the ecumenical assembly of European Christians in Basel in 1989, it was repeated that there cannot be real peace without justice but that justice demands peace.

In communion with you, we place all our hope in Jesus-Christ, our Lord. With you we assert that He knew injustice and hatred, that He suffered, that He died because of them and that He is Alive.

On behalf of the members of the French Forum

Anne-Marie SCHOTT, National Coordinator

Photo credit: Viola Schenk

News from International & Ecumenical Partners

4th European Ecumenical Assembly

The Conference of European Churches (CEC) has started discussions on planning the next Fourth European Ecumenical Assembly in 2026. EFECW has participated in the first three, by offering workshops, sending delegates, etc. In specific, the involvement of the Forum in the past ecumenical assemblies:



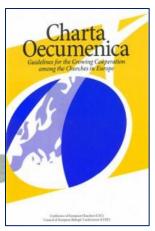
- In 1989 in Basel, Switzerland. The theme was Peace and Justice. The Women's boat on the Rhine and also active participation by Forum women in worships and hearings.
- In 1997 in Graz, Austria. The theme was Reconciliation- Gift and God and source of New Life. Forum was responsible for the event, In the light of genetic engineering new biopolicy and call for justice and participation in decision-making.
- In 2007 in Sibiu, Romania. The theme was this time The Light of Christ shines upon all-Hope for Renewal and Unity in Europe. Themes were discussed in Café Ruth.

What could be our EFECW contribution in 2026, during the 4th European Ecumenical Assembly?

Read more on https://ceceurope.org/ the CEC new Governing Board from June 2023 you find on https://ceceurope.org/who-we-are/governing-board

You can also subscribe to the CEC's newsletter to regularly be updated about their activities.





Charta Oecumenica was published in April 2001 in Strasbourg by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Roman Catholic Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE). The Charta Oecumenica is a list of guidelines for the growing cooperation among churches in Europe.

During the Forum's General Assembly in August 2022, in Strasbourg, a group of women shared experiences of spirituality, community, action and hopes for a living church in communion out of the Charta.

https://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/ChartaOecumenica.pdf

pilgrimage. A document still valid, but is the pilgrimage still alive? What can women tell among

The Charta is a working document, not doctrinal, meant to be a process in progress - an Emmaus

women about their experiences of ecumenism? May be these experiences can be shared now, when a process of revision of the Charta has been initiated. A joint working group from the CEC and the CCEE met from 1 to 3 March 2024 in Lodz, Poland to update and revise the Charta Oecumenica. The group discussed the progress in current revisions of the Charta and outlined steps to finalise the revision process by 2025, which marks the 25th anniversary of the birth of the Charta. https://ceceurope.org/ecumenical-group-meets-revise-charta-ecumenica

The Commission on the Status of Women 2024



The 68th annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68), the UN's largest annual gathering on gender equality and women's empowerment, took place this year from 11 - 22 March in New York and online, under the priority theme, "Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective". Please read resolutions and resolutions and

more about the agreed conclusions and resolutions on

https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw68-2024/session-outcomes

Some general reflections...

The UN Women's Commission is an inspiring arena where feminists, grassroots activists, experts, and diplomats from all over the world meet and together drive policy development forward. During this year the women's commission (CSW68) mobilised civil society actors, among other things, for increased funding of gender equality and SRHR- Sexual and Reproduction Health and Rights as well as increased economic empowerment of women and girls.

Funding, which was part of this year's main theme, is crucial for the possibilities for pushing on progress forward in the terms of the rights of women and girls. This applies to both gender equality work carried out by the state and by the civil society. The civil society is one key actor for change and accountability.

Churches, church organisations and ecumenical organisations arranged side events to visualise different themes related to women's situation in the society.

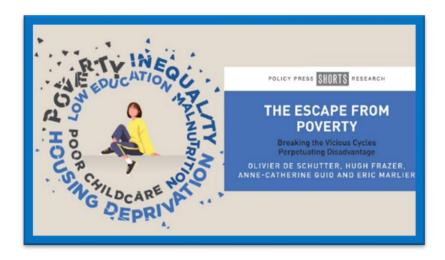
Carin Gardbring, EFECW Co-president

"Social justice in action: Breaking the perpetuation of poverty across generations"

Council of Europe – Conference of INGOs⁴

To mark the World Day for Social Justice, the Actions for Social Rights Committee of the Conference of INGOs, in partnership with the International Movement All Together in Dignity - ATD Fourth World, organised a webinar on Monday, 19 February 2024, with English and French interpretation. (Click this link to watch https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSUHUP4H-x4)

The highlight of the webinar was the presentation of the book "The Escape from Poverty - Breaking the Vicious Cycles Perpetuating Disadvantage", published on 17 October 2023 - the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. After the presentation of the main priorities for



action identified by the authors, aimed at breaking the vicious circles of poverty from one generation to the next, the discussion put the book messages into perspective by the advances in social rights protected by the Council of Europe's Revised European Social Charter. This book is dedicated to the memory of Tony Atkinson and Fintan Farrell, who, throughout their lives, actively and relentlessly fought against poverty and inequality and for social justice across Europe and around the world.

© Council of Europe. Read more <u>here</u>.

⁴ EFECW is member of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe and represented by Anne Marie Schott, ex-CC member and National Coordinator in France

Announcements



We are very happy about the arrival of our daughter Laetitia Elisabeth, born on 25 May 2024.

Evelyne Zinsstag (ex-member of EFECW Coordinating Committee) with Cedric and Tristan

Please support:

The <u>Ruth-Epting Fund</u> which is essential for supporting financially the participation of women in EFECW events!

and The Fellowship of the Least Coin

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