



## EFECW News

December 2019

### Jesus Christ: the child in the manger; a face of God's presence



Hope, waiting and wonder coins the time of advent, before Christmas. Waiting for God's gift to us, the child in the manger. Hope is the power which carries us as we carry the hope.

It darkens around us. The wars, the climate threat, the humiliation of people and animals fill our streams of news and information. We also have personal burdens to bear. Straight into this reality is the story of the child born in Bethlehem. The child is the centre for all Christmas celebrations. In the Christmas hymns we sing about the birth of God in Bethlehem. God who created and creates everything and who is greater than the universe chooses to be born as a human being in Bethlehem.

What does it mean? This means that God Himself is close in every child.

That the Creator of the universe chooses to make himself known as a vulnerable child in need of care, warmth and food. God does not turn out to be a ruler. God seeks us in our very innermost, in our hearts, and awakens our confidence to life. God wants to build with the bonds of love across the earth, families, friends, congregations, villages, communities and cities. In all this, trust, or as the language of the Church says, resides in the belief in God. The child born in Bethlehem is God's way of meeting his beloved humanity. With confidence that we can take care of life and each other. With confidence in our spontaneous care to bring the child into his arms and give it warmth and protection. God's Christmas message to us is that God needs us and wants to be near us.

It means that God becomes body.

The mystery of the universe is revealed in a child being born and in a bread being broken. God

becomes body in Bethlehem and fills every cell in our bodies with his presence. God's presence in all matter is given a face in Jesus Christ. The face is perhaps the body's greatest gift, which makes us known to each other and ourselves. In the bread that is broken in the Eucharist we receive God who becomes body in our hands. Our hands are cupped around the fragile piece of bread. Our hand becomes the manger that gives God a home in our world. God wants nothing more than to dwell with us, in us, and fill us with the divine love that gives life to the entire universe and to our blue shimmering planet in the universe. God becomes body in our hands and fills us with His creative, playful, life-giving love. God's Christmas message to us is that God Himself becomes a body in Bethlehem and that our young or worn out bodies are a beloved body in the light of God's birth in Bethlehem. Our bodies carry divine presence and no care is too small, no reverence in vain.

That means God is exposed.

There was no room for them in the shelter. There were no nice hotel rooms. The donkey and ox stable becomes God's first home as a human on earth. This means that God knows every earth floor, that no apartment is too simple to be God's home. This means that God has solidified himself with all vulnerable and marginalized. With the one who is not at the centre! Or is it that God has changed the centre? That it is now in the margin, with the one who is exposed and without influence that the flame of God's love burns most clearly? Is it hard for you to find God? Then look to the one who lives in alienation, in the sparrow that falls to the ground, in the cod that disappears. God is exposed and calls on you to stretch yourself, to provide the care and reverence you can for all life.

*Carin Gardbring, member of the EFECW Coordinating Committee*

*The birth of God in Bethlehem is a real reason  
to wish each other Merry Christmas!*



## EFECW Coordinating Committee meeting

24<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> October 2019, Uppsala, Sweden

The third meeting of the Coordinating Committee of EFECW was held in Uppsala. During these four effective days, the CC members shared news from local forums and other activities undertaken by the CC since the last meeting in Corfu and being presented of different aspects of the work of the CC (including results of two neighborhood meetings (in Estonia and Armenia), representations in ANDANTE, ESWTR, CEC, WCC, ICFLC etc., results of two working group within the CC (Forum strategy and Safe space), discussed the planned Young women's seminar, as well as effective communication within the Forum (incl. website, social media, newsletters).

A session on finances was held by the Treasurer Gabi Kienesberger and the NC meeting 2020 in Armenia was discussed in details and tasks shared among the CC members.



The highlight of the meeting was the participation of the reputable Swedish ecumenists: Inger Lise Olsen, Adviser on gender issues for the Church of Sweden, (Nordic Ecumenical Council of Women); Joanna Lilja, Policy Advisor, Church of Sweden; Annika Lindé, Thematic Advisor, the Church of Sweden; Esther Kazen, General Secretary of the Swedish Ecumenical Women's Council; Cecilia Ralfe-Stelander, National Coordinator; Nausikaa Haupt, the Roman Catholic coordinator in the Christian Council of Sweden; Kajsa Berg and Maria Stjernedorff, Forum for ordained Women in the Church of Sweden; Maria Rengård Sivertsson, Ecumenical work in the University Church in Uppsala; Anne-Christine Lindvall, the Serbian Orthodox Church in Sweden. Anna-Tora Martin, chair of the Uppsala Ecumenical Women's Council/Forum, Inger Jonasson, Chair for the Swedish WDP, Amanda Björksell and Hanna Lindh, Swedish Change makers. They provided a profound insight into ecumenical work in Sweden.

*Natalia Horbal and Carin Gardbring, EFECW CC members*



## Russian-speaking neighbourhood meeting

20<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> September 2019, Yerevan, Armenia

Armenia welcomed us with sunny, warm, real summer weather. Equally warm was the neighborhood meeting of EFECW in Yerevan. I liked everything: interesting, informative speeches of the participants about the role of women in the formation and development of Christianity, the role of women in the church and society of Armenia, Moldova, Georgia; productive discussions; trips to monasteries; a master class on Armenian folk dolls; walk through the city; singing fountains you can watch for hours; Armenian sweets... A special impression was made by



the visit to the Hor Virap monastery at the foot of the majestic Mount Ararat, where for 13 years the founder of the Armenian Church – St. Gregory – was kept. It was extremely interesting to meet and talk with the Armenian bishop!

Amazing Armenian hospitality, a cosy atmosphere in which thousands of kilometres from your home, you feel at home, were stunning. To tell the truth, I had the feeling that I lived here once; in a past life. I *discovered* Armenia as a high-spirited, religious country inhabited by hospitable people.

For the first time participating in EFECW's neighbourhood meeting in Armenia, me and the Forum's CC from Ukraine Natalia Horbal presented Ukrainian traditions and customs, religious practices, denominations in modern Ukraine, existing temples and monasteries, as well as the role of Ukrainian women in the development of Christianity and in the struggle of Ukrainians for independence; contemporary problems of Ukrainian women in society, in particular in the conditions of the ongoing war with Russia.

We are extremely grateful to Marianna Apresyan and the participants of the Forum for the warm, inspiring meeting, unforgettable impressions and memories of sunny Armenia!

*Uliana Kohut, EFECW in Ukraine*



The Union of Armenian Women of Georgia "Shushanik" took part for the first time at the neighboring meeting of the Russian-speaking Forums of the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women, hosted by the Armenian Forum of Christian Women.

The event was attended by the coordinators of the ecumenical forum from Moldova, Ukraine and Armenia. The theme of the meeting was "Woman and good news." The Union of Armenian Women



of Georgia "Shushanik" of the Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia in the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women participated for the first time, so the interest in the Neighboring Meeting of Russian-speaking forums was huge. Georgian representatives of the Catholic (Noem Tharzian) and Lutheran churches (Pastor Irina Solej) also took part in the meeting.

Yes, the Soviet Union collapsed, where all the above countries were together, created together, but after the acquisition of independence by all republics, everything went in a different way. After that, unfortunately, we do not know much about each other, except that these are Christian countries, and that people of other faiths also live here. How do they live, how do they cope with their problems, what are they happy about?

Taking in consideration the fact that it was a meeting of Christian women, the interest in everything was twice as strong, because in addition to the topic of our meeting "Woman and good news", at the forum we became participants and good messengers of each other, following the words of John the Baptist "Go to my brothers and say...".

Coordinators of Armenian, Ukrainian, Moldovan forums, as well as Georgian representatives talked not only about their church traditions, culture, role and activities of women in society and in the church, but also discussed the issues that women in all Christian countries face – these are some national traditions, a huge burden of women in preserving the family hearth, which they carry on their fragile shoulders, many problems not only in their families, but also in the society as a whole.

Personally for me, this meeting was fruitful, interesting and a great discovery, and I learned a lot about Moldovan Christian women, the pain that Ukrainian mothers carry within, how they struggle with the various challenges of the modern world, what their achievements are, what they rejoice, where is that universal gap that we all have to fight (contend) with, uniting around the universal Christian faith and the commandments, we have tried to understand how to help each other, so



that not only our prayers, but also the demands were heard by the all-powerful men of all countries and stopped fighting each other, not accepting weapons, not dividing humanity, but uniting against various artificial and natural destructive disasters.

On the second day of our meeting there was a discussion, and all the above mentioned issues, which we discussed together, brought us all Russian-speaking Christian women - Armenians, Moldovans, Ukrainians, Assyrians – from Orthodox, Catholic, Apostolic, Lutheran and other churches, to one



thought: we women should unite again around one goal, in the prism of the Christian faith and commandments, in order to preserve peace on earth, so that all can create and live in friendship and brotherhood, so that our children do not cry because of war, cold, famine, persecution and natural disasters. It is necessary to help each other, and not to divide the land, to unite around one idea – to preserve our long-suffering land, for having created it God said: "Love each other", and by creating the woman, He laid upon her a great responsibility, as a woman, a mother, creator and the beautiful half of humanity in order to save our planet by all means.

P. S. That's what actually the "Neighboring Meeting of Russian-speaking Forums" ecumenical forum of Christian women in Yerevan gave me.

It was also proposed to establish an ecumenical women's coordinating council in Georgia, which was welcomed by representatives from Georgia. At the end of the meeting, several topics were proposed for the following meetings. I would suggest words from the prayer that was heard at our meeting in Yerevan: "Oh God, open our hearts to love each other as You are able to love us..." And finally, I will say the wonderful words of the poet Marina Tsvetaeva from "Requiem": "I address with a demand for faith and a request for love..." People of our planet, love each other!

*Gohar Mkhitaryan-Mazmanian, Georgia*

## News from the members

### 'Economics for all', Scotland

The UK is a country where economic inequality is growing, and while 83 per cent of the population think that economics is important, only 12 per cent say they understand it.

This knowledge gap is not surprising but it presents a significant challenge to understanding and influencing the way governments manage the economy. One of the reasons why our grasp of economics is patchy is a lack of diversity in the field. Historically women have been excluded from economics, which has often been seen as a subject that only elite, white men can understand or are interested in. This exclusion has come at a significant cost, with women disproportionately bearing the negative results of today's economic policies, particularly in relation to welfare.



To meet this challenge, the Church of Scotland has partnered with Economy, a charity whose vision is to make economics more accessible, to bring together groups of women from all walks of life in Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow to create a space where they can debate and discuss economic theory and practice.



Women in Cranhill, Glasgow, have now finished their course. The passion in the room was evident from day 1. There were cries of "Things will never change, women will never be represented in economics". There were questions about whether or not the invention of the washing machine really did empower women. Others were more optimistic but clear about the injustices they face with the economy as it is.

The lack of financial support for single mothers and the cost of childcare make finding work that pays a challenge. Is there a better way to do things? In addition to the practical and personal, there are opportunities to think big: to critically analyse the concept of economic growth, to ask why we measure the economy using GDP and to explore how our models of economics are harming the environment.

For all of us it is easy to think that economics is not for the likes of me. However, the more I learn, through conversations such as the one in Cranhill, the more I realise that the economy is intrinsically linked to everything we do. Increasingly these discussions make me question whether the accumulation of more money is a helpful measure of success for the economy. In isolation at least

it seems to me to miss so much of what is required to ensure that we, and the planet, are able to flourish.

It excites me to know that small pockets of women across Scotland are thinking about the impact of economics in their communities, and to know that EFECW is hoping to focus on economics next year. I look forward to seeing what changes come about as a result. Perhaps, as we learn how to navigate the economic jargon and challenge harmful policies, we will find a way to create an economy built on the firm foundations of equality.

If you want more information on this, feel free to contact Eleri on: [ebirkhead@churchofscotland.org.uk](mailto:ebirkhead@churchofscotland.org.uk).



### General Assembly, Germany

#### Anlässlich der Mitgliederversammlung des ÖFCF e.V. vom 25. – 26. 10. 2019 in Halle/S.



erklären wir unsere Betroffenheit und Trauer angesichts der Gewalttaten in Halle/S.

Durch einen rechtsextremen Anschlag am 9.10.2019 wurden zwei Menschen kaltblütig ermordet, viele an Leib und Seele verletzt und traumatisiert. Der Anschlag galt der Synagoge zu Halle, in der unsere jüdischen Glaubensgeschwister am Versöhnungstag, Jom Kippur, zum Gottesdienst versammelt waren. Der mutmaßliche Täter hat seine perfide Tat gefilmt und ins Netz gestellt: „Der Gewalttätige brüstet sich mit dem Bösen.“ (Psalm 52,3)

Der 9. 10. 2019 ist zugleich der Tag des Gedenkens an die gewaltfreien Demonstrationen in der DDR.

Unsere Anteilnahme und Solidarität gilt den Opfern, ihren Familien und Freunden. Wir stehen an der Seite unserer jüdischen Geschwister und pilgerten schweigend am Abend des 25. 10. zur Synagoge und zum Dönerimbiss, dem zweiten Anschlagsort.

„Gewaltlos – verwundbar – politisch aktiv“ lautete das Thema der diesjährigen Mitgliederversammlung, das durch ein Referat von Frau Prof. Dr. Hildegund Keul (Universität Würzburg) aktuell entfaltet wurde. Die anwesenden Frauen in der Mitgliederversammlung vertieften im Austausch das Thema und bekräftigten damit das Ziel des Forums:

„Sich für die Einheit von Kirche und Welt und für Versöhnung einzusetzen...



## Presentation of EFECW members

### Ökumenisches Forum Christlicher Frauen in Europa Bereich Deutschland

#### 37 Years German Forum: from Summer School to Baltic Sea neighbourhood meetings

The ecumenical forum has existed in Germany for 37 years. Dedicated women from various church traditions developed an organization on national as well as on European level, with the objective to strengthen and promote the important issues of women. The project was still new when the borders opened to the east in Central Europe. Thus, on top of the topics, peace, ecumenism and the position of women in the church, other issues were added, such as understanding and reconciliation. They worked together with expertise, dedication and passion.



*German Coordinating Committee (some women are missing): left to right: Irmhild Klose, Margarete Willburger, Mechtild Boecher, Carola Ritter, Marianne Milde CJ – Halle, Nov.2019*

The forum grew a lot in these decades: 25 women's associations / working groups or women's groups together with the so-called "friends" form the big picture.

The search for the Christian identity as women in Europe was and is a focal point. Another focus is the dialogue with women from other churches - and now increasingly with other religions.

Encounters and getting to know

life reality in other European countries and cultures clarifies misunderstanding and creates cohesion.

Influential for the German Forum was for a long time the Summer School and are now the Baltic Sea neighbourhood meetings (last one in 2019 in Estonia). Another leading point during the annual meeting of the members is the study section on contemporary topics ('Europe' 2018, 'Vulnerability' 2019, 'Anti-Semitism' 2020).

The group of "friends" is currently the strongest in the Hamburg-Hannover area, and they have been celebrating the day of creation for several years.

We are looking forward to meeting the Co-Presidents and the CC in Hannover in spring 2020 and to exchange the program with other European Fora.



## ANDANTE, Study Days and General Assembly

24th – 28th April 2019, Snagov, Romania

### “Women in the Church make the difference”

Andante includes 19 associations from 12 different countries. The mission of the European Alliance of Catholic Women's Organizations is to be a Catholic women's voice and be an actor in building a living Europe that works for the common good and gives a more human face to Europe and the world. Andante works, through its networks in Europe and through local initiatives, for the just participation of women in society and in the church, and for the common good of all people.

Andante encourages and empowers Catholic women in Europe to reach their full potential, both in society and in spiritual life. It brings strength and inspiration to Catholic women in their daily lives and encourages them to be active in their communities and in the church.

Andante wants to be a platform for Catholic women to express their ideas, to discuss them frankly and with trust, even if they arrive at different conclusions. *“We need to establish common values across our different cultures; we should be able to respond to current and emerging issues in a way that reflects Gospel values and our experience as women. We can offer the female vision of the Common Good.”*



The theme of the Study Days of Andante, the European Alliance of Catholic Women's Organisations, held in April 2019 in the Carmelite monastery in Snagov, Romania, was "Women in the Church make the difference".

60 Catholic women from 13 different European countries met for five days to discuss this subject.

Since the beginning and through the centuries women have been making a difference in the Church and in the spread of the Gospel. They have been disciples, saints, scholars and educators. Women today want the Catholic Church to become a home where all are

welcome and all can flourish. A Church which looks outward and which uses the gifts of the Spirit in all its members. But many women do not feel at home in the Church. They often feel silenced, marginalised and excluded from decision-making. Women are able to use their special gifts in service in many respects, but often find themselves unable to use their expertise and experience in leadership roles within the church. Here the contribution of women religious could be most profitably employed. The appointment of a token number of women to decision-making posts is not sufficient. There needs to be a change to a more inclusive culture at all levels. We can learn from experiences in other Christian churches.

In order to impose changes in the Church, the participants of the Andante Study Days exchanged ideas for current and future activities. The diversity of cultures and spiritual traditions inside the Andante network empowers and encourages women in working together in Europe.

The mission of Andante is to work for the common good and a human-oriented Europe. The importance of women taking part in the forthcoming European elections was emphasised.

## The speakers

Tina Beattie, professor of Catholic Studies and writer at the University of Roehampton in London, spoke on "the Church of the Future - a home of Hope".

Boroka Béké, pastor of the Reformed Church of Romania, her lecture was on: Female Disciples - The Need and Possibility of Training Women in the Church.

Zuzannes Flisowska, general director of the "Voice of Faith", developed the theme: New Strategies for the Inclusion of Women in the Church.

The different **workshops** focused on spirituality and the practical engagement of women in the Church:

For the first workshop a strong film(!) "Habemus Feminas: for a Church with women" was screened. In 2016, Catholic believers from German-speaking Switzerland made their way to Rome to make their voices heard. They walked 1,200 km from St. Gallen to Rome to demand greater equality of women and men in the Church. They wanted to express the hope that in the future, men will no longer think and make decisions without women. They hoped to be received by Pope Francis but were only able to hand in a letter.

The 2nd workshop moderated by theologian Dr. Angela Büchel Sladkovic was a Bible study: Lydia, an important woman in the first Church.

3rd workshop facilitated by Joanne Seldenrath: How to make a homily?



The Statutory Assembly and the elections concluded the time of the conferences and reflections. Sabine Slawik was elected to form with Vroni Peterhans the new presidency. Mary McHugh was warmly thanked for her nine years of presidency.

These five days were rich in sharing and exchange, the Eastern countries still have many ways to go in terms of social assistance and education.

The stay ended with the cultural visit of Brasov, a city in the center of Romania.

More information and reports on Andante website <https://www.andante-europa.net/en/>

*Anne Marie Schott, EFECW CC member*



## ESWTR, European Society for Theological Research of Women

12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> September 2019, Louvain, Belgium



About 110 women participants attended the 2019 conference in Louvain which dealt with the ambiguity of visibility and invisibility of women and the functionalisation of representative of particular groups that are often unseen.

On the first day, the question addressed was: Which interests are behind the mechanism of power and suppression? And How does this relate to gender roles and privileges and how does hypervisibility relate to the invisibility of power and how does visibility sometimes a way of concealing other aspects? The key note lecture was given by Kristine Suna Koro and a response was given by Silvia Martinez Cano. This interaction set the tone for the conference. We could not have selected a better team!

After this good start, we had a series of committee meetings which were open to all the members so that all the members could participate in the making of the decision of our society. That is very important to us!

The next day we touch on issues in political philosophy, racism and gender, and we had a particular focus on the Jewish perspective, with Anya Topolski given the key note address and Teresa Forcades given an absolute brilliant response.

Following the key note address and response, we had created time for four parallel short paper sessions—short paper sessions are important for members to inform others what sort of research they are doing, what kind of findings they had and what issues are still in need of further investigations. People from all sort of backgrounds, nationalities, ethnicities and religions gave papers.

In the afternoon, we loaded everyone on two busses and went to the Africa-museum, in which we had a seminar on post-colonial thinking, lead by Bambi Ceuppens and Judith Gruber. We of course also visited the museum which has over the past years dealt with its colonial history and has reinvented itself.

In the evening, we were welcomed by the Peeters family in their lovely backgarden and celebrated the 2019 issue of our journal!

The third day we turn to our Muslim sisters and their perspective on race and racism. We also address the processes of sexualisation, gendering, and 'religionization' that shape our social regimes of in/visibility. It was Shirin Amir-Moazami who offered the key note lecture with Nadia Fadil formulating her response.

Afterwards we had three times a short paper session with each three parallel sessions.

A nice concluding evening followed, with much of talk and laughter.

The last day was dedicated to Christian theology and we sought to address questions related to the ways it has shaped regimes of in/visibility through gender and race narratives. The key note lecture was given by Eske Wollrad with Elzbieta Adamiak formulating a response.

A final plenum concluded the conference.

Importantly, all mornings there was a morning ritual, led by Bess Brooks, Jane McBride and Susan K. Roll. With creativity they poured out their wisdom and invited the participants to pray-fully engage with the complex issues that were ahead of us.

To give an idea of what sort of issues were addressed in the short papers sessions, I can only give a couple of titles: Aleksandra F. Michalska talked about Reverend Stoyne – the blind seeing with (de)constructive power; Trees van Montfoort talking about The Invisibility of the non-human world; Teresa Toldy on the Myth of the caravels and the invisibility of a feminist post-colonial theology in Portugal; Olga Ruiz Morell on Presences and Absences of Women in the Didactic Texts of Classical Judaism; Silvia Lilian Ferro on Hacia una Teología del Cuidado como ética cristiana absoluta; Zilya Khabibullina on The image of a Muslim woman in the Russian information space: Stereotypes and attempts to overcome them in Islamic media; Maria Andrea Gonzales Benassini on La In/visibilidad de las mujeres a 50 años de la II Conferencia Latinoamericana de Medellín.

The conference had many wonderful moments: powerful rituals, challenging lectures, intense discussions, loud out laughing, and emotional super moments: I recall one Belgian nun who participated in the conference and who had lived here entire life in South America. She started talking to Maria Andrea Gonzales Benassini who had given her insights about Medellín. The two women grabbed each other hands, tears in their eyes, recognizing each other and recognizing the importance and the value of each other work. Then these two ladies set down and pulled out their calendar to jot down each other email address. Just brilliant. And we all stood there and enjoyed the moment.

*Univ.-Prof.Dr. Kristin De Troyer*



## Religions for Peace, 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly

19<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> August 2019, Lindau/Bodensee, Germany

**Women share leadership at Religions for Peace.** At the 10th Assembly of Religions for Peace (RfP), the World's largest and oldest interfaith network, in Lindau/Bodensee Germany from 19 to 23 August 2019 women became more visible than ever. In the new board they represent 37%. And the next Secretary General is a woman. This is for the first time in the history of this global peace movement which started in 1970 and grew from 39 to 125 member countries. 900 to 1000 men and women took part in the assembly titled "Caring for Our Common Future – Advancing Shared Well-Being".



Dr. Azza Karam was born in Egypt, lives in the USA, is a Dutch citizen and researches at the free university of Amsterdam besides several other tasks as an adviser to the UN. Her main issues are religion, development, population, women's rights.

RfP has a global and some regional Women of Faith Networks which lobbied for these results during preparatory conferences in their own region and during the women's pre-assembly which was held one day before. About 150 women from all over the world and different religious backgrounds came together.

From a women's perspective they worked on the five main issues of the assembly: positive peace, preventing and transforming conflicts, promoting just and harmonious societies, working for sustainable and integral human development, protecting the earth. They emphasized the important role of women in the peace building process. Many women are activists in the urgent struggle to protect our Mother Earth, shoulder to shoulder with indigenous people. Just in the days of the assembly the rainforests in Brasil were heavily burning. The European women met on Thursday and closed their meeting by a photo in black clothes, thus connecting to the campaign to end all violence against women "[Thursdays in Black](#)".





Important female speaker and longstanding board member of Religions for Peace is Ela Ghandi, 81 year old granddaughter of Mahatma Ghandi. She grew up in South Africa and was as social worker very much involved in actions to overcome violence against women. She held a strong plea to change the beliefs around the role of women depending on her husband. "We have to deal with the patriarchal nature of all our societies. Men and women should be partners."



A delegation of women from the MENA region – Middle East and North Africa – had undertaken an impressive trip to Jordan to meet with Syrian and Iraqi refugee women and those who help them find a better life. They showed an impressive video report of this encounter – supported by RfP - in solidarity with those women, inspiring by the hopeful projects which are set up in this region.

Among the lightning talks showing concrete and practical narratives of peace making among religions was Leila Hasandedic, a young Muslim woman from post war Bosnia. Having grown up in Mostar and having lost several family members including her grandmother, she never had crossed the famous rebuilt bridge to the other part of the town. A project "Two schools under one roof" was set up after the war to overcome prejudices among Muslim and Catholic youth. A Catholic young man of this group is now one of the leading peacebuilders in Bosnia. He is the son of a colonel who is most probably responsible for the murder of Leila's grandmother. He asked for forgiveness. They started a network and became peacebuilders together.

The assembly emphasised time and again that we should not stay with beautiful words. They have to be followed by actions on different levels. Every plenary was closed with a concrete action point to which the assembly members committed themselves: reduce or stop eating meat, stop or reduce the use of plastics and paper. Don't waste water. Struggle against the injustice of the huge richness of some two thousand billionaires in the world over against the big crowd which has not enough even to survive. Talk to your governments to encourage them in creating just and fair structures. So that we can leave a sustainable world to our children and the generations to come.

You can read the entire final declaration [here](#).

The Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women EFECW is member of the RfP European Women of Faith Network. From 2013 to 2019 Martina Heinrichs (EFECW Co President 2006 – 2014) was Co President in the RfP World Council. She attended the 10th RfP Assembly together with Fiona Buchanan, currently one of the EFECW Co Presidents.

*Martina Heinrichs, former Co-President EFECW*



*From left to right: Martina Heinrichs, Fiona Buchanan, Carla Maurer*

## Global program on prevention of son preference and the undervaluing of girls

17<sup>th</sup> October, Etchmiadzin, Armenia

On October 17, in Gevorg Chorenkchyan Hall of Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, the WCO Armenia Round Table (ART) Foundation and the UNFPA Armenia Country Office held a workshop on "Son Preference and the Undervaluing of Girls in Armenia and the Church". The event was funded by the European Union in the framework of the Global Program on Prevention of Son Preference and the Undervaluing of Girls, implemented by UNFPA. Marianna Apresyan, EFECW Co-President presented a project implemented by Armenian EFECW.



"The Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women of Armenia five years ago started its social activity by a project "Give Me Life" which was against sex selective abortions in Armenia. This project was financed and sported by JSL foundation of EFECW and WCC Round Table Foundation. During our eight months project activities in different villages situated at the Armenian borders, we understood that this problem in our national mentality and that instead of healing the results of this problem, we should get to its

reason and start from this.

In Armenian reality the sex selective abortion has deep roots and is related with national mentality. Marriage is the foundation of family and social life which serves to ensure the reproduction of humanity. For us Armenians, marriage is one of the most significant events that are mandatory, prestigious, and respectful, as marriage is the foundation of a new family that implies generation. The entire Armenian wedding ritual is filled with numerous religious-magical rituals dedicated to the bridegroom's reproduction.

In the past, maybe even now in villages, at the time of the boy's birth, his bed was surrounded by elderly women who used all their magical knowledge to keep the mother and baby's life from evil and so on. When the boy was born, all celebrated and congratulated each other, but when the girl was born, people wished patience and comfort to family members. They even wished them the next baby to be a boy.

This mentality has usually been linked to the hard and preoccupied life of Armenian women. Because in the past girls got married at an early age and they took the whole care of family on their shoulders patiently and silently. The woman could have the right to speak out and express herself later (up to 50 years old) as a mother of a big family. This was also the reason for not wanting a baby girl for an Armenian woman. In the big Armenian family, every new girl's birth was undesirable, so in order to suspend or limit the birth of a baby girl, they gave her special names which has special meaning.

This mentality was due to the following factors:

- The boy or son considered as Armenian family keeper, he is continuing the family name, his birth is considered as happiness.
- In case of girl birth the heritage of the family should be left to the husband of daughter, which is undesirable.

- The son is a working hand and supporter of the family, so stability and prosperity of the family economy are expected from son.
- The Armenian nation and families had been permanently endangered and targeted by attacks by Turkish rule, so they have seen their protection and security under the patronage of a man, meaning from the family man and son. Therefore, giving the son an advantage in our environment was also conditioned by the fact of self-protection.

In the context of sex selective abortion, I would like to draw the attention of our priests to enhancing the role of women in relying on the Bible. In the Old Testament we have numerous examples of women who, regardless of their age or social status, were chosen by God to serve His divine plan: Sarah, Deborah, Anna, Esther, Ruth, Judith, etc., as well as prophesying in the name of the Lord, Moses' sister Mary, Huldah, the wife of the prophet Isaiah. A remarkable argument for honoring a woman and raising her role is found in Bible A Ezra 4.13-29, where Zerubbabel had spoken of women and truth:



“...Gentlemen, is not the king great, and are not men many, and is not wine strong? Who is it, then, that rules them, or has the mastery over them? Is it not women? Women gave birth to the king and to every people that rules over sea and land...”

I would like to appeal our attention to the fact that when Jesus first gave his hand to Mary Magdalene and delivered her from a life of total bondage. She was an outcast in society. Jesus treated women in a manner far beyond the cultural expectation and traditions of the day, respecting them fully as persons and considering them a necessary part of his ministry.

Now, following Jesus' example, we should estimate the role of women, mothers, and daughters in the family, encourage their born, because they give birth to future heroes, intellectuals, clergy and they up bring and educate them to be a human in the society. So let increase the value of life and let change the mentality of sex discrimination and accept every one as a creature who has the image of God.

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