



## EFECW News

April 2021

### Jerusalema ikhaya lami – Jerusalem, My Home

Everywhere in the world, there are people dancing to the music of this Zulu song: nurses, policemen, nuns, school classes... As I watch these videos, I feel a deep sense of longing: When will we be able to come together again without protective measures, without renouncing to hug each other, to eat and drink together? I long for the world to become a place of conviviality and joy again. The lyrics of “Jerusalema” express my desire:

*Jerusalema ikhaya lami* - Jerusalem is my home

*Ngilondoloze* - Save me

*Uhambe nami* - Walk with me

*Zungangishiyi lana* - Do not leave me there

*Ndawo yami ayikho lana* - My home is not here

*Mbuso wami awukho lana!* - My kingdom is not here!



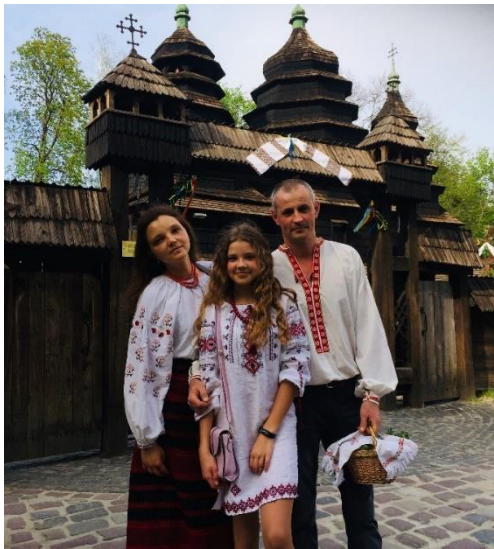
Photo: [Dancers to Jerusalema in Italy](#)

These words are a prayer. The authors of the song were inspired by an old church hymn in Xhosa which quotes the vision of the “new Jerusalem” (Revelation 21:1-4): Then I saw a new Heaven and a new Earth. (...) And I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, descending from Heaven (...). And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is among men! God will dwell with them and they will be his people. God will be with them and will be their God. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death; there will be no more mourning, no more lamentation, no more pain.”

As Christians, we are used to wait. We are waiting for the end of winter, the end of the pandemic; we are waiting to celebrate at Easter the final victory of life over death; we are waiting, finally, for the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven, a kingdom where our tears will be dried, our anguish soothed, our grief comforted. Our kingdom is not here! But we know it is coming. Nothing can stop it. So let us keep waiting for this new world, hopefully and joyfully, and let our desire never fade. Jerusalemema ikhaya lami!

*Evelyne Zinsstag, CC member*

## The Coordinating Committee sends Easter greetings



**Greetings to all of you on the bright day of the Resurrection of Jesus, from Ukraine!**

Easter is the brightest, most majestic holiday in our country. Jesus Christ came to the Earth to turn humanity to God and to prove that true Love always overcomes malice and cruelty, by giving his life for us. In these days, Ukrainians recall our defenders, who gave their lives for our freedom, and ask God for protection, peace and revival for our country, for Europe, for the world!

**We have never been alone. God is with us!**

Easter is celebrated with a variety of bright traditions. The preparation begins two months in advance. Most people lent and fast with strict devotion, as the country is passionate about

adhering to the faith. Everyone awaits Easter day, as a festive mood blooms and families come together to celebrate. Eggs are decorated with particular ornamentation and folk patterns that have special meanings. After Palm Sunday services, it is customary for Ukrainians exiting church to gently tap each other with the blessed pussy willow branches as a wish for good health, wealth and happiness.

The night before Easter people often do not sleep, go to the cathedral for service and bring with them a variety of dishes (Easter cakes and eggs, cheese and meat) in baskets decorated with spring flowers, which are blessed with holy water by the priest. Despite all the culinary treats on the table, the meal should start with the Easter cake; every single crumb is eaten and never thrown into the garbage. Easter is celebrated for three days – in church, with family and friends.



The traditional greeting in Easter time is: «Christ has Risen!» «Indeed He has Risen!»

*Natalya Horbal, member of CC*

### **Our Hope - The resurrection of Christ!**

During Lent in my congregation we sing a hymn about to rest in my longing. The text opens my mind for the Easter mystery. “Rest in your longing. The silent meeting takes place. All your longing Lord hears and sees. Life changes quickly, suffocates by the threat of death. Lord dispels the fear, the grain’s hope is great. The future awaits, rest in faith, the grain that now slumbers, soon begins to grow.” Women rest in faith. Faith gives us life. Yes, Christ is risen. Christ’s Resurrection shapes our worldview, our hope, our motive for action. The Resurrection gives hope and strength to rise, build and change our reality. The Resurrection urges us and even force us not to accept the chains of injustice and evil as a reality that will not change. Women always act.

*Carin Gardbring, member of CC*

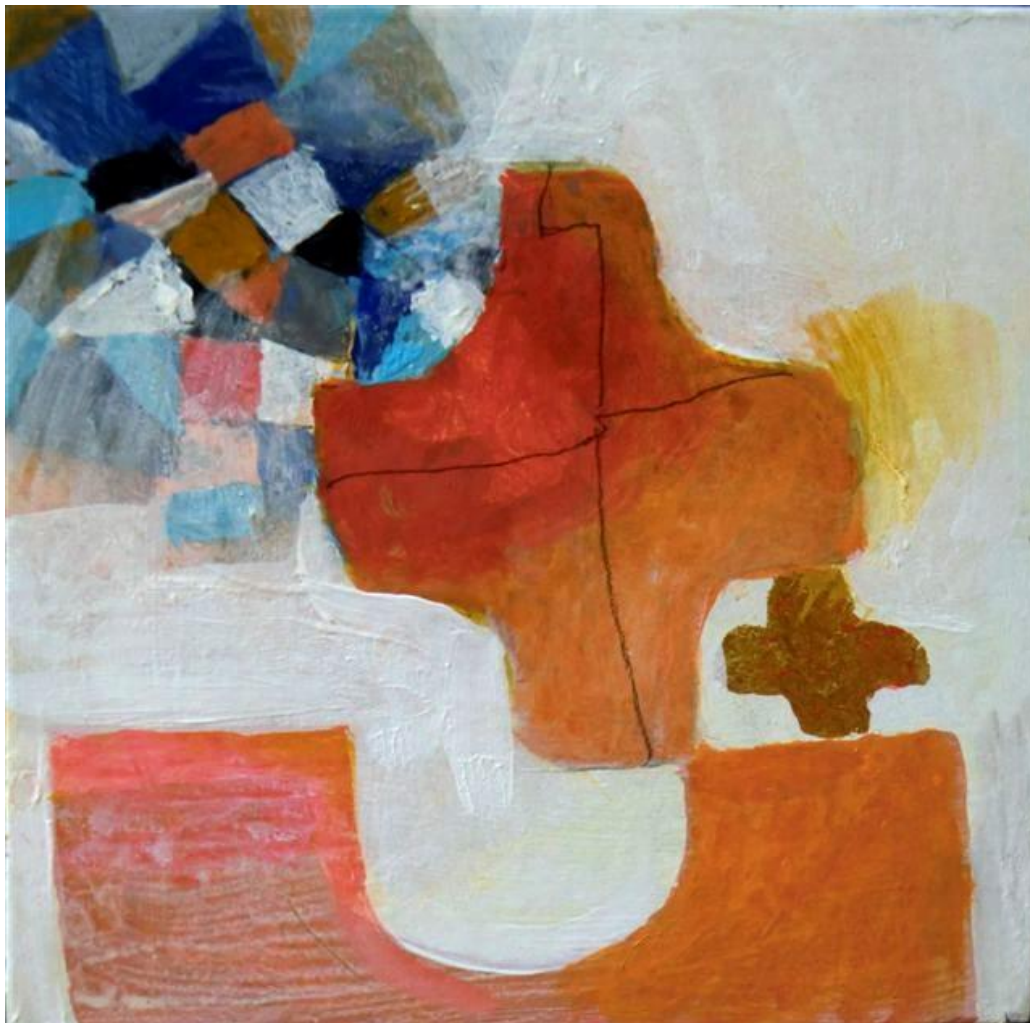
## Shockingly Good News

Three days after his death on the cross, three women went to Jesus' tomb to anoint his bruised body. What did they expect to see and feel as they entered the tomb? The open wounds of their teacher, the many marks of his humiliation... what would have been their effect on the friends of Jesus? What would they have told the other disciples, all hidden away in the city of Jerusalem, petrified with fear and despair?

When the women arrived at the tomb, they did not find a bruised body. Only a figure dressed in white who told them of the resurrection of their teacher. They were equally petrified by their discovery: Behold the tomb of Jesus – it is open and empty! Behold the traces of their common hope, of their shared suffering – they are gone!

The women fled. The good news of Christ's resurrection is difficult to integrate or even accept. It is as overwhelming as the idea that a few thin lines of white could lift such a huge, heavy cross from its hole, as in the image of Alsatian painter Arcabas. All the weight of despair, massive and compact though it seemed, is erased here. The cross seems to be floating in the air; fine lines indicate its fragility. From the monochrome ground it is raised up into the daylight and the radiant colours of the sky. And in the hole beneath it, death and fear can hide no longer. May it be the same within our hearts today. A blessed Easter to all!

*Evelyne Zinsstag, member of CC*



*Image: « Résurrection – Ascension – Pentecôte »,  
collection privée d'Arcabas / Jean-Marie Pivot (1926-2018), Alsace France*



**“... the old is gone, the new has come.” (2 Cor. 5:17)**

May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace! A wish for all to have in our hearts the joy of Holy Resurrection of Christ. We wish you love, hope and power to overcome the difficulties and to create a new life.



Armenians celebrate the feast of Holy Resurrection after a Great Fasting. They take part in all ceremonies of Great Week before Holy Resurrection, then in the evening of fasting's last day the families go to churches, attend to liturgy and receive Holy Communion. Afterward people return to homes and gather around the traditional eastern table. On the table there should be red wine, red coloured eggs, fish, sweet rice ("chamichov phlav"), which is the rice prepared with raisins and rich assortment of herbs. First, the family members pray together, then they greet each other by breaking/cracking each other's colored eggs and, finally, they enjoy the table.

*Marianna Apresyan, Co-President*



To share bread together,  
to fight for justice,  
to take care of each other  
and for our environment,  
to mourn about the dead  
and to share life and love.

*Gabi Kienesberger, Treasurer*

**Praise be to You who are the perfect light,**

You before whom the darkness of this world recedes.

Be praised and glorified You,

who gave us time - time to think

so that we can correct what we have done wrong.

Let us celebrate Your closeness, and purify our hearts

Have mercy on our rebellious will and keep us on the path of salvation

You are our living God!

Pour out Your blessings on us to glorify You

in the glory and joy of the Resurrection!

May Your power flow through our body and our mind

so that we can overcome temptations and torments

Revive what is good, but was dead in us

Open hearts that are closed and awake those that are asleep

for Your living faith so that we can, in harmony and courage,

in peace of heart continue on the path that You illuminate.

*Marijana Ajzenkol, Co-President*



*Photo: Saša Montiljo, Zemun (Serbia) art photographer*

“The angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.’” — Matthew 28:5-6

These women, and many women who have come after them, can rightly be called history's midwives of hope. And they become for us, on the resurrection morning of Easter, the primary example in the story of what we too are called to be — midwives of hope. Have a very happy Easter!

*Fiona Buchanan, Co-President*



Painting: *Jaillissement*. Annelise Freyd 2014

### Alleluiah!

May the light of Christ, rising in glory,  
dispel the darkness from our hearts and minds."

I wish you an Easter filled with the light and the life of the Risen One.

May the Easter season fill you with joy and hope in the confidence  
that erases fears.

May the Pasch of Jesus illuminate with his strength all the passages,  
narrow or wide, we have to live.

Let us draw together new strength in the Risen Lord.

### Let's go to "counter-fear"

Let's sing the first stanza of the magnificent hymn  
"EXULTET", **Exult** or Paschal Proclamation which opens the  
holy night of paschal Vigil which celebrates the light of the  
Risen Christ.

May the joy of angels burst into the sky,  
May the joy of the world burst forth,  
May the joy of the sons of God burst forth in the Church:  
The light illuminates the Church,  
The light illuminates the earth, Peoples, sing!  
R. We praise you, splendor of the Father, Jesus, Son of God!



Painting: *Renaissance*, Annelise Freyd, 2016

Happy Easter to everyone and to each one of you dear sisters of the Forum. Have a nice time with your family and take care of you.

*Anne-Marie Schott, member of CC*



## EFECW online workshop - meeting

“Women's past, present and future”, 15<sup>th</sup> March 2021

### Participants at the event share...

This workshop surprised me very much in contrast to any international conferences I've attended before.

Around 50 women met up on Zoom. After a first “hello”, the upcoming joy of being reunited with fellow women and friends from England, Ukraine, Serbia, Armenia, Switzerland, France, Spain, Italy, Germany and many more countries dominated the meeting. Apart from the elected international and national coordinators, this time other interested members could meet up as well. Thus, former members were able to meet again and exchange ideas with the younger women who are currently active.



The just recently celebrated International Women's Day was the impulse for the meeting with the topic “Women's past, present and future”.

In the spiritual introduction, assisted by two power-point presentations, the women in charge called for detailed meditations in silence with questions regarding time and its value: How can I make time for what matters to me? What relationships do I want to maintain? What are my next steps?

After that issues such as current injustice, lack of freedom, violation of human rights and the threatened safety of women were discussed in groups. Some results were:

The EFECW retain a self-determined future as women in their churches and societies. They remain hopeful and visualise clear goals. Many current conflicts were raised.



The women told their stories and drew their conclusions from the past and the present: "We need each other as witnesses of our history. We need each other to understand the relations connecting us all. We need each other for mutual empowerment, so that we do not subside our demands for a better society!"

After speaking the Lord's Prayer each woman in her own respective language and singing the song

"Sister carry on!" together, the meeting ended. A choir wouldn't have dared singing online because the words, voices and languages simmer together in an unpleasant way. However, here I felt the prayer and singing at a distance as an audible expanse of the European space in which we could see each other that evening.

A few women stayed online after the meeting ended and used the evening to chat, update each other and develop their friendships further.

*Dörte Massow, EFECW Germany*

*(translated from German by Agnes Kienesberger)*



It was wonderful to meet you all over Europe again! Despite technical problems, we spent a good time together.

What is time? How do I deal with time? What is important to me, what is less important to me? And what am I not doing because I have no time?

To deal with the past, present and future as a woman in time. Feminism. Grandmother, mother, daughter... across generations. Women before us who fought for their rights. Women today who continue this work. Women who dare, like our friend "A" from Armenia, who stands up for her Syrian minority. Women who let their voices be heard, who stand up straight. Women who quietly dress in black on Thursday. Reading, educated women. Women who support each other. Women who can hear and women who pray.

Dear women, thank you for the time we spent together! The way is long. But we walk it together and set standards where we live, weave and are. God bless and keep us all!

*Edith Hajnalka Toth, Vice President EFECW Romania*





## News from EFECW members

### “The Leeves family serving the Evangelical and the Catholic Church in Greece”

Athens, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2021



In November 2019, on the completion of 350 years of presence of the Ursuline sisters in Greece, on the initiative of the two brother archives of the “Archive of the Catholic Archdiocese of Tinos” and the “Hellenic Historical Evangelical Archive”, a conference was organized and held at the Hellenic-French School of Ursulines in Athens. The theme of the conference was “The Leeves family serving the Evangelical and the Catholic Church in Greece”.

The Greek branch of EFECW – Damaris’ contribution to this event was helping in the organization and undertaking the publication of the workshop’s minutes which was of particular interest, since in the life of the Leeves family both the Evangelical Church and the Catholic Church played an important role.

The Leeves family lived and worked in Greece in the 19th century. Henry D. Leeves arrived in Istanbul in 1821, as chaplain of the Anglican Church and representative of the British and Foreign Bible Society. He organized the

translation of the Bible into languages spoken in the Ottoman Empire. He himself while traveling, distributed tens of thousands of copies of the Bible. When Greece was liberated, he took over the representation of the Bible Society in Athens, became chaplain of the city's Anglican Church and built the Anglican Church of St. Paul. He was the one who was appointed responsible for the translation of the Bible into Modern Greek, the "N. Vamvas translation" thus completing a vast project.

He had four daughters and a son. Under the influence of the Oxford movement, a Catholic movement within the Anglican Church, the two daughters, Sophie and Mary-Anne, became Catholic nuns. The two sisters had parallel lives. Deeply spiritual personalities, to the point of mysticism, they chose the monastic life so that their spirituality could be combined with action. They were initially included in the newly formed order of St. Joseph and worked in the schools of Athens, Piraeus and Syros. Eventually each one chose her own path, without straying from their fundamental choice: mysticism and action. Sophie joined the order of Sisters of Carmel and established a new branch, the "Apostolic Carmel" based in India, where it flourishes to this day. Sophie Leeves (*Soeur Veronice de Jesus*) has been declared "blessed" and her canonization is due. Mary-



*Sophie Leeves (Soeur Veronice de Jesus)*

Anne (*Soeur Marie de St. Ignace*) chose the Ursulines order. She established in Tinos the monastery of Ursulines and the Loutra Girl's School, now counting 160 years of life, faith and action.

The minutes were released in July 2020 in the form of a 250-pages book.



*Mary-Anne (Soeur Marie de St. Ignace)*

The book is bilingual, because one of our objectives is to promote it at EFECW, as well as to anyone who would be interested in Europe. The Greek texts were translated into English and the English text into Greek by professional translators; in the middle of the book there is a sixteen-page colour insert with photographs of the life and action of the Leeves family, as well as some documents referring to the two sisters who followed monasticism.

The book includes the greetings of the various Church and school representatives, as well as the speeches made, by Mr. Giannis Tsevas, of the E.I.E.A. Dr. Lee Gatiss of the University of Oxford and Fr. Markos Foskolos of the Apostolic Centre for Faith and Culture of the Catholic Archdiocese of Naxos-Tinos. In addition to these, there are three other texts: a brief biography of Sophia Leeves, by Fr. Marcos Foskolos, the Memories of Sophia Leeves for her family and her sister, as well as a timeline of the family. The entire content of the book can be read as a novel, since it is written in a very vivid and descriptive way.

*Ersie Antoniadou, member of "Damaris the Athenian"*



*Above: The Anglican church of St. Paul in Athens. Leeves raised the funds for the construction and served as the first vicar.*



## International Women's Day 2021 celebrations in Armenia

*Even if I go through the deepest darkness,*

*I will not be afraid, LORD,*

*for you are with me.*

*Your shepherd's rod and staff protect me.*

**PSALM 23:4**



Armenian Women Forum celebrated the International Women's Day with hope for a safer future. We prayed for our sisters in Europe to overcome pandemic and to be in God's protection.

During the last 7 years, since the foundation of the Armenian Women's Ecumenical Forum (founded on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016), Armenian women have grown, evolved and got new ecumenical experience. They got married, became mothers, or they are going to be mothers☺ and continue their inspiring ministry in Armenian society.

**The elder and young generation will move on, side by side!**



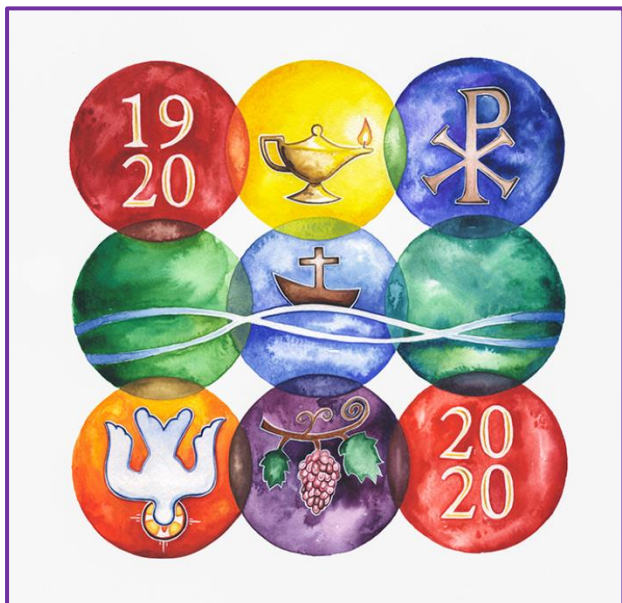


## Representation of EFECW

**“The Hope of Communion: From 1920 to 2020”,**

**Conference of European Churches, online, 16-17 December 2020**

The Conference of European Churches (CEC), together with the Louvain Centre for Eastern and Oriental Christianity (LOCEOC) are hosting this online conference. Distinguished speakers have been invited from across Europe and North America to bring into focus the two landmark ecumenical texts from 1920, namely “the Patriarchal Encyclical Letter to the Churches of Christ Everywhere” issued by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and “The Appeal to all Christian People” issued by the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops. The conference explored the expectations for unity reflected in these texts,



examined their relationship to the subsequent ecumenical developments, and addressed the question of what the hope of communion means for relations between the churches today.

I participated to this conference as representative of EFECW and member of CEC’s Ecclesiology and Mission committee.

This conference was a reflection on the Hope of Communion of Ecumenical relations over the past 100 years. Presentations explored the impact of the two above-mentioned documents and considered the ongoing ecumenical developments inspired by them. The speakers showed ways to looking forward the value of Hope of Communion among churches in the future; proclaiming effectively the Good News of

Jesus Christ. There was a theological imperative to continue working towards finding unity in Christ.

The conference was a good example to learn about experiences of different denominations, ministries and collaborations in Europe and beyond.

The worthy reflection for EFECW is:

- To see our importance and role working well together as Christian women across Europe collaborating with churches and denominations keeping our fidelity in Christian values.
- As an ecumenical organisation, to take responsibility to develop our relationships as positively as we can and to work together, as well as we can, in order to prevent divisions at all levels in our societies because of political, religious, social and other issues, which cause fractions and which become sometimes irreparable.
- To look back since the founding of EFECW and to see how we followed our “Hope of Communion”. In other terms, how we worked towards our common and Christian vision, mission and deeds. How it started, how it developed and how we have it now (as a heritage).

Marianna Apresyan, EFECW Co-president

*Note: Contributions made to the Conference on “The Hope of Communion: From 1920 to 2020” have now premiered on [CEC YouTube](#) channel. The playlist features video presentations from renowned theologians and church leaders from across Europe and beyond.*

## My years with the ICFLC International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin

Martina Heinrichs 2013 – 2021

### What is FLC?



This world-wide women's prayer movement for Justice, Peace and Reconciliation – 'Integrity of Mother Earth' will probably be added next year - started in 1956 in the Philippines by an Indian woman called Shanti Solomon who was on a peace mission with an international team of Presbyterian women to overcome the wounds between countries caused by World War II. Her visa to Korea was refused, and she had to stay in the Philippines while the others moved on. In her vision that prayer surpasses national boundaries she got the idea that each woman – even the poorest - can contribute whenever she prays for peace and reconciliation by setting aside her 'least coin'. Inspired by the biblical story of the widow who gave her least coin which was much more in the eyes of Jesus than the rich young men had given.

This ecumenical prayer movement spread quickly among the Asian countries and beyond. Today all continents are part of it. EFECW is the partner-organisation for Europe at the table of the International Committee ICFLC Annual Meetings. Yearly about 40 (now only 20) projects for women and children are supported, Block Grants for core costs are given to the partner organisations, scholarships for young women of the South and recently also for older women are given. Throughout the year Emergency Grants are allocated where needed to help during natural disasters and alike. Also in-gathering services are prepared, and every two years a volume of the Circle of Prayer with contributions from women from all over the world is published. There are two sister organisations represented: the World Day of Prayer (WDP) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) through its programme 'Just Community of Women and Men'.

FLC has an Executive Secretary based in the office in the Philippines. When I started, it was Corazon Reyes, and from 2018 onwards Liza Lamis took over. I participated in the search committee and in the online interviews in 2017. There is also a part-time assistant, Lalaine Toledo.

### 2013 – 2021

As a Regional Coordinator for Europe I took over from Catherine Gyarmathy, former EFECW Co-President who had served FLC for one term, 4 years.

This is the list of my Annual Meetings in the ICFLC which are documented by the FLC Minutes and by my reports to the Forum.

South Korea in 2013 as a women's pre-conference to the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches WCC in Busan.

2014 in the Philippines including the visit to the FLC office and being guests at the Asian Church Women's Conference ACWC in Tagaytay.

2015 in Guatemala, also visiting a women's cooperative for textile folklores in the mountains which had been supported by FLC.

2016 in Louisville Kentucky combined with the 70th anniversary of Church Women United CWU – In this year EFECW confirmed my second term with FLC.

2017 in Slovenia in cooperation with World Day of Prayer WDP Slovenia.

2018 in Thailand again connected to the General Assembly of the Asian Church Women's Conference ACWC in Bangkok.

2019 in the Abokobi Presbyterian Women's Centre in Ghana. With the highlight of getting to know African Women's Studies and Mama Mercy Amba Odooye as their founding mother.

2020 First online Annual Meeting due to COVID 19. Proving that it is possible, but very different from real meetings: different time-zones, very tiring, less space for informal and personal contacts. And a big advantage: less costly!

Since the beginning of my years with the ICFLC – and only in the last three years – the whole International Committee has changed and the members were replaced by their organisations by new women. Except Yamina Appolinaris, the current ICFLC-president from Puerto Rico, her organisation could not find somebody to replace her. In my period I have been vice president for one year and president for two years.

#### **Future relationship EFECW – FLC:**

- Revitalise FLC in Europe, more attention for FLC gatherings and collections during EFECW activities.
- Keep this very precious connection to a world-wide faith women's network of solidarity and common prayer in action. Create alliances.
- Continue to invite women of other continents to our conferences/Assembly.
- We need to have a better overview and coordination of the women and groups engaged in FLC. Connecting them and feeding them.
- Better feed-back about the offerings which have been sent (receipts.) The offerings should be sent to the Forum account and will be forwarded once or twice a year to the FLC account.
- Prior to the pandemic there was already a decline of income and there were some thoughts to economise costs by alternating the live Annual Meetings with online gatherings every other year.

*Martina Heinrichs, former EFECW Co President (2006-2014)*





## Faith in Europe

### Online meeting, January 2021

In January I was invited to an online meeting of "[Faith in Europe](#)". I really enjoyed attending the meeting and learning about the work of Faith in Europe, and of individual members, over the past 40 years. The overriding theme in the discussion was about the future of the organisation - many of the organising team were in their eighties and felt ready to hand their responsibilities to the next generation. This "next generation" would probably be people who are just beginning retirement - who might have time and energy to volunteer, as well as many years' professional experience they could bring to the table.



*The Churches' European Relations Network*

I spoke about ways in which an even younger generation might be persuaded to get involved with the group - university students. If the reason for targeting the age group on the cusp of retirement is to find people who have the time and energy to commit to volunteering, then perhaps those who haven't yet joined the workforce would also be willing to consider participation. Students have the energy and enthusiasm to take part in exciting projects, as well as the time to commit to extra-curricular activities. In addition, they are often on the lookout for opportunities that they can add to their CV.

In order to illustrate this, I spoke about several initiatives I took part in when I was a student. In particular, in my final year I joined the Council of Christians and Jews' Student Leadership programme. This initiative, run by the charity's staff, involves a residential leadership training programme at the start of the academic year, followed by guidance and financial support in organising interfaith events at our respective universities. We were also regularly invited to CCJ events nationally, where we could meet and make connections with older members and learn about the charity's work more widely. The programme's alumni network is invited to maintain a relationship with the charity, from attending events to contributing articles for newsletters.

I also talked about the EFECW and how much I had enjoyed being a steward at the General Assembly in 2018. In addition to setting up conference rooms, welcoming delegates and providing technical and administrative support, the stewards were encouraged to join in discussions and workshops as much as we wished. It was a great way of introducing a younger generation to the work of the forum - by the end of the week, several stewards were inspired to put themselves forward for election to committee and one was elected.

After the 2018 General Assembly I headed to Germany and then France to complete my Year Abroad, teaching in a private language school in the Frankfurt region for 8 months and then welcoming visitors to a lavender farm just outside Aix-en-Provence the following summer. I went back to Oxford University in September 2019 to complete the final year of my languages degree and threw myself into leading various student interfaith projects. I unexpectedly but happily moved in with my partner in Birmingham this time last year as lockdown began and completed my final university exams remotely. I began working as Executive Assistant in a recruitment consultancy last August, where I get to use my language skills on the phone and in writing every day.

*Florence Butterfield, steward at 2018 EFECW General Assembly*

## Women's voices for interfaith engagement

### Webinar, 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021

A webinar to highlight “how women, through their interreligious engagement, have been agents of hope, hospitality and healing” in a world struggling with COVID-19, as well as “many other pandemics.”

The webinar was marking World Interfaith Harmony Week highlights the role of women in post-COVID cooperation. The webinar took place on February 4, established by the United Nations this year as the first International Day of Human Fraternity.



Women of faith have a vital role to play in promoting more effective dialogue and cooperation in a world struggling to overcome the divisive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. That conviction was shared by Jewish, Buddhist and Christian participants in a webinar organised by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) to mark the 1- 7 February observance of World Interfaith Harmony Week.

### Vulnerability and resilience

Dr Debbie Weissman, former president of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ), is a hopeful pessimist. She noted how many of the nations and U.S states led by women “seem to have done somewhat better in fighting the pandemic”. Many say that women do better because of the experience of motherhood. But she rather thinks that the experience women have as being “marginalised in our own cultures and faith communities,” she said, so “maybe we have developed a certain kind of empathy or identification with others who are similarly marginalised,” resulting in the development of “a special kind of resilience.”

Dr Gaya Gamhewage, head of Learning and Capacity Development for the World Health Organization's Health Emergencies Program, spoke from her perspective as a woman shaped by the Buddhist values and culture of her native Sri Lanka. Describing herself as not “a religious person, but a woman of faith,” she said getting to know people from all faith traditions through her work has helped her to understand “the connectedness of humanity.” Young women need role models, she added, showcasing the ability

to be both strong leaders, as well as “people of faith and compassion.”

For centuries, women’s disadvantaged position in society has enabled them “to see things from a different perspective, to embrace vulnerability, to have humility, to have discipline, but also to really ache and hurt while others are in pain.” Seventy percent of the world’s health force is made up of women, she noted, yet only twenty-five percent of the people in health leadership are women and many of those who died in the first six months of the pandemic were women health workers. Women demonstrate power to be practical but women’s power needs to be more value based.

### **Theological, emotional, and practical engagement**

Rev. Dr Elina Hellqvist, interim director of the ELCF’s Office for Global Mission, noted that interfaith dialogue is a relatively new area for the church in Finland, where two thirds of the population are Lutheran and may rarely encounter a person from another faith tradition. But she emphasized how much practical engagement goes on at grassroots level, such as the interaction of children from different faith backgrounds in playschool or other educational contexts.



*Photo: panelists’ own*

In Finland, she said, “we see more women involved in interfaith dialogue than in many other parts of the church life,” including ecumenical engagement, which is often seen as “men’s business”. While women’s “practical attitude to everyday life” can be seen as a strength, it can also distract attention from “the big discussions” about faith values and principles, she added.

### **Listening and learning**

Participants spoke of the long-term consequences of COVID-19, including mental health issues and increased domestic violence in many countries. Women of faith, they said, can model the kind of “listening and learning” from marginalised communities that is needed to rebuild resilience. The younger generation may carry the burden of the pandemic for the rest of their lives, so faith communities must tackle the “barriers that hinder participation and inclusion,” ensuring that “all can have a voice” in the search for lasting solutions. Women can undertake that challenge!

See the webinar on <https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/womens-voices-interfaith-engagement>

*Carin Gardbring, EFECW CC member*



## WCC observes a week of prayer one year into COVID-19 pandemic

22-27 March 2021

*With a year soon past since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the spread of COVID-19 a global pandemic, the World Council of Churches (WCC) observed a week of prayer from 22-27 March.*

The week invited a time of prayer and reflection on both the lament and the hope expressed and experienced across the world during what has been a year of unprecedented suffering, but also one when churches have worked together in ever new ways to adapt, respond and accompany communities through mental, physical, economical, spiritual, and environmental crises.



WCC acting general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca described this week of prayer as an opportunity to experience and convey churches' common allegiance to Christ.

"During the week, we will gather to offer intercessions especially for the most vulnerable and for those who are on the frontline caring for them often under harsh circumstances; and recommit ourselves to active compassion across what separates us, in obedience to the one who had compassion for the crowds and ministered for their healing," Sauca reflects.

The week of prayer was convened with WCC member churches and ecumenical partners, and shared prayers and spiritual resources produced in response to the pandemic.



### "Voices of Lament, Hope and Courage" for churches worldwide

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has prepared global prayers at the request of its member churches and regional partners to allow the many people affected by COVID-19 to express sorrow and nurture hope for the future.

The prayer book served not only as a guide for the special WCC "Week of Prayer in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic" from 22-27 March but also as a resource for expression by local, regional and global gatherings throughout the year.

*Above information are news from World Council of Churches website*

## Announcements

### WCC invites youth to Stewards Programme for 11th Assembly in 2022

**21 August- 10 September 2022, Karlsruhe, Germany**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) invites ecumenical youth to be stewards at the 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, in 2022. The Stewards Programme aims to bring together a dynamic and diverse group of 160 young people from all over the world, from 21 August to 10 September 2022. The invitation is open to young people from a variety of backgrounds, churches and regions.

The Stewards Programme includes: an on-site ecumenical formation, participation in the Ecumenical Global Gathering of Young People (EGGYP), and work at the 11th Assembly. Stewards will arrive in Karlsruhe a week prior to the assembly to learn about the ecumenical movement and to participate in the pre-assembly gathering.



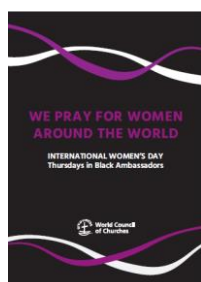
Stewards are young people between the ages 18 and 30 years old. As a diverse community, stewards bring their faith, experiences and visions to an ecumenical experience of togetherness and friendship, with English as the working language of the programme.

Joy Eva Bohol, WCC programme executive for Youth Engagement and a former steward, notes that “being a steward will push you to be in uncomfortable spaces; will foster your involvement and participation in the wider ecumenical movement, and may redefine your life.” Key attributes of stewards are patience and the ability to work with people from other countries and cultures as a team.

Former steward Thomas Kang recalled that he has fond memories of those days as a steward in a WCC assembly. “It opened my eyes to the several ways we can serve as young Christians in a changing world. I met hundreds of people from different contexts trying to work together and discern as the body of Christ. That definitely strengthened my faith and identity. The stewards programme was a life-changing experience,” said Kang.

WCC looks for young people capable of integrating their experience back in their local contexts, motivated to multiply the ecumenical enthusiasm, ready to “do ecumenism” locally.

**Deadline for applications** now 30th June 2021. [Click here to download the application](#)



### Special prayers, Thursdays in Black

**International Women's Day, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

This year, WCC Thursdays in Black Ambassadors have prepared special prayers to support women facing sexual abuse and violence and to highlight international solidarity to overcome gender-based violence. The [prayers](#) are available as separate cards for sharing on social media, as well as a full collection available from March 8.



*Please continue to support:*

The Fellowship of the Least Coin (<http://www.flc.net.ph>)

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

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The **Jacqueline Stuyt Legacy fund** is accepting applications.

All 2020 projects have been cancelled / postponed.

Please find how to apply to Jacqueline Stuyt Fund on our [website](http://www.efecw.net).

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