



# EFECW News

April 2022

Remember me when you come into your kingdom...

Is there a time ahead of us in which peace will reign? We don't know what the future holds for us. It could last one day, one year or tens of years - we don't know. We stand at the door of time and our own future. We have gifts and burdens. What do we do with them? Although we do not know what awaits us, we have a wish list: peace and security, health, jobs, jobs for young people, enough money, less fear, less worries, more joy... I believe that all people have these desires, even those who seem to have a lot.

But, in order to realise some of those wishes, we need to know what we carry with us and what we are ready to do to make our future and the future of society better. And what is better or which of the roads ahead leads to a "better tomorrow"? Jesus advises: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your works of charity and the glory of your heavenly Father" (Mt 5:14). But there are many temptations ahead of us. Many challenges and seductive paths that lead to the future and the "better" age. All of us have challenges and temptations. We all face it. Some fail and some win and overcome. "If only I had wings like a dove that I might fly away and find rest. Far away I would flee; I would stay in the desert. I would soon find a shelter from the raging wind and storm". (Ps 55: 7-9), says the psalmist. Jesus dwells in the wilderness. He goes into solitude and dedicates himself to a prayer life and another world rises in spirit, thoughts and feelings. He thinks about what awaits him and what he should do. He, Jesus, God, after that experience returns to daily life and is tempted. The first temptation: greed. "Order these stones to become bread." The second temptation: "I will give you all this power and glory if you worship me" The third temptation: show that you are better, different: "jump down, angels will carry you in their arms, the people will admire..." But Jesus answers, "Depart, Satan! Worship only God and serve him alone!"

The Bible says that "when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13). He will appear to him through other people when he is crucified on the cross: "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross, and we will believe you" (Mt 27:41).

It is not always easy to recognise or resist the challenges, temptations and traps of time. None of us is perfect and holy. But temptations can often be beneficial to our spiritual well-being. If we overcome them, if we resist them, we can thank them because we have learned humility and at least a little purification of the soul. That is very important and precious.

For the peaceful and simple ordinary life it is necessary to distinguish between good and evil. It is necessary to turn to the future with confidence and hope and to be able to witness in joy the experience of readiness to give the people around us the hope that is in us.



*Marijana Ajzenkol, EFECW Co-President*

## EFECW XI<sup>th</sup> General Assembly

Strasbourg, France, 5-9 August 2022

### Hope & Responsibility

**" ... and always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you have." 1P 3,15**

Dear European friends,



In Strasbourg, you will be welcomed by your sisters of the French Forum. The Forum is made up of two groups, one in Paris, the other in the Alsatian capital, an ecumenical and European city!

The two groups function independently, but are in regular contact, either by sharing documents or by visiting each other.

In order to get to know each other better, we thought we would give the floor to Claire-Lise in Paris and Marjolaine in Strasbourg, who will present the life of each group.

In this way, we hope to encourage relations between all the participants<sup>1</sup> of the General Assembly next August and to facilitate the Strasbourg meeting.

Friends of EFECW, the French Forum welcomes you now: See you in Strasbourg!

*Michelle Lefevre, National Coordinator French EFECW*

### EFECW France: the group in Paris

#### History

It was created in 1984, while the European Forum was born in 1982. Marjolaine Chevallier took part in the founding process, and we were both present at the Gwatt session in Switzerland which established the draft statutes for the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women in Europe, in 1982. The initial idea of the founders was to give more visibility to Christian women in the churches and society by organising them into a network (Europe, probably because it was cut in two, was the last continent to do so) but also, to create links and to build bridges between churches and women, who were very isolated, in the countries of the Soviet bloc.

In France, we relied on three women's movements to set up the group: Action Catholique Générale Féminine (now A.C.F.), Femmes et Hommes en Eglise (Women and Men in the Church) and the Orsay Group. The latter, which came out of the Young Women's Movement, when it became a movement for lifelong education, was the only Protestant women's movement at the time.

During the 1980s, we informed church leaders of our existence and organised a fairly systematic mapping campaign, particularly in the direction of Catholic and Protestant religious orders. Thanks to Christiane Bordeaux's relations and her long practice within the ACF, we also met with women's

---

<sup>1</sup> To register for the General Assembly, follow the link provided in the invitation letter, and complete the online form. For any further questions please contact [info@efecw.net](mailto:info@efecw.net).

movements (teaching nuns, nurses). A Dominican nun, Sister Marguerite-Marie, in Evry, was for years an enthusiastic member of our group. During this period of promotion of our network, we benefited for two consecutive years (1995 and 1996) from an operating grant from the Secretariat of the Bishops' Conference, which stopped after the European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz in 1997.

In the beginning we had varying number of members, up to about 30, Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant women. The members are both representatives of Christian women's associations and women who join us individually. We organised regional meetings in Dijon, Aix-en-Provence, Angers (2015) to make ourselves known. Later, we initiated meetings between women, neighbours from French-speaking countries which have continued every two years. We have had several "meetings of neighbours" in France, Italy, Switzerland and Spain:

- Turin 2005 "Cultural traditions and ecumenical practices"
- Aix-en-Provence "To build Europe, we need visitations - Work on the Ecumenical Charter"
- Madrid 2008 "Ecumenical and interreligious dialogues"
- Velletri 2009 on the Italian Forum
- Geneva 2011 "Ecumenical life" in Geneva
- Strasbourg 2012 "How to be in solidarity with persecuted and refugee Christians in the East?"
- Velletri 2013; "We are all migrants"
- Madrid 2016: "Ecumenism and interreligious dialogue in a world of conflict"
- Cret-Bérard 2017 "From tolerance to welcome".



Despite our limited resources, we have also organised two meetings of National Coordinators, one in Strasbourg in 2003, an introduction to the workings of Europe, using the local group. The theme was: "Towards an open and united Europe in justice". The other was held in Versailles in 2008: "Women's dialogues in a multicultural and multi-religious Europe".

## News

We continue to be involved each year in the preparation and implementation of the World Day of Prayer and to participate in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

We have active individual commitments in our respective churches, but our group remains a place of reflection. We meet regularly four times a year to discuss current issues. Recently, we have been particularly concerned with combating violence against women. We have been members of the French Coordination of the European Women's Lobby (CLEF) for about ten years. We support most of the commitments of this very broad grouping of feminist and secular associations, associating ourselves as much as possible with their initiatives.



Here is an example: During the meeting between neighbours, organised in Corfu from 1 to 3 March 2019, the national groups were informed of the vote on the Council of Europe's Convention on violence against women, known as the Istanbul Convention. Women from different countries, were encouraged to follow the implementation of the provisions of the Convention in their respective countries. Informed by CLEF of the visit to France in January 2020 of a group of experts from the Council of Europe (GREVIO) to take stock of the French situation, we studied the conclusions of the experts' report, took note of the dysfunctions observed and the improvements to be made to the protection system in our country. In a press release, published in a recent Newsletter, we listed the legislative, judicial, social, administrative and financial areas, and we undertook to monitor the implementation of these recommendations by our institutions.

On the spiritual level, and in view of the General Assembly of the Forum which will take place in Strasbourg in August 2022, we are working on the theme of hope: "How can we live and bear hope today?" The question is more relevant than ever in these uncertain times.



In recent years, several groups in Western Europe have reduced their activities, while in Central and Eastern Europe, groups with a younger average age remain active, often more present in their churches and spiritual communities than in society. It is important that regional diversities are maintained within the European network and are reflected in the international meetings. These meetings are a real richness where stimulating relationships are born, between East and South, North and West of the continent. Between the General Assemblies and the meetings of the National Councils, we appreciate

the sending of the quarterly News of the network, the Newsletter, which has become a real instrument of mutual knowledge and information on women in Europe and in the Churches. We try to do our part.

This real effort of cohesion and rapprochement between the national groups, carried out by the current Coordination team, is also manifested by the recent organisation of video-conferences in



Zoom, following the cancellation of the meetings (NC in Armenia in August 2020) due to global pandemic. We need to experience this virtual link regularly in order to feel part of our network; it can become a working tool alternating with real meetings.

Through these meetings, rich in friendship, and the regular and well-informed communications provided by the Newsletter, we look forward to building our identity as European Christian women, in all the diversity and richness of our differences.

*Claire-Lise OTT, from Paris*

### **EFECW France: the group in Strasbourg**

Madeleine Bach, a teacher of mathematics, mother of a large family, active in several Catholic movements, but also an ecumenical activist (married to a Protestant at a time when this was difficult), was the one who initiated the creation of this group. This was done in 1994, with me, Marjolaine Chevallier, a Reformed Protestant. I had been elected (in 1979) as a member of the international committee of the CEC (Conference of European Churches, an institution which represents the other Christian churches, in relation for the Roman Church, with the Committee of European Bishops' Conferences). It was in this capacity that I was associated with the creation of the European Women's Forum (EFECW) and closely followed its beginnings, with Ruth Epting (Basel), then Nicole Fischer (Geneva).



It is humorous to note that Catholic women have been full members of this Forum from the outset, even though the Roman Catholic Church is not a member of the World Council of Churches, nor is it a member of CEC at the European level. This is probably because it was only a women's issue and did not concern the clergy at all!

I am surprised, in retrospect, that Madeleine Bach and I let about ten years go by without imagining that a local ecumenical women's group had a place in Strasbourg, next to the one in Paris, which was more a group of leaders of different national movements. There had already been various meetings, but informally, in our city, where the habit of ecumenical debate is old and alive. But it was the only local group created in a provincial town in France.

When our group was officially constituted, we sought to allow the meeting of very diverse Christian families. There has always been a good proportion of Catholics. Among the Protestants, there were Lutheran-Reformed, but also a Methodist, a Mennonite or an Evangelical, as well as a deaconess; and

at least one Anglican and one Orthodox. This diversity has not always been able to be renewed. So now it is a group of about fifteen more or less old friends who have got to know each other, who pray together, and who rejoice in their deep mutual trust and affection.

Except during those years disrupted by the pandemic, we regularly have 5 or 6 meetings a year: always a time of shared prayer, information, debate on a theme or listening to a speaker. In these meetings two important dates (where husbands and friends are invited): the solemn and joyful celebration of the Week of Prayer for Unity in January and an end-of-year party in June, in a garden around a barbecue!



We have mobilised, with our local resources, to host the Forum twice at European level: in 2003, the national representatives, then in 2013, the "neighbours".

We also tried to ensure that at least one of us could participate either in the national meetings in Paris or in other meetings of neighbours. Of course we are now very happy that Anne-Marie Schott, our leader, has been appointed to the CC, the liaison position at European level. Thanks to her we will host the G.A. of the forum in August 2022, during which some young women will probably join us, and this fills us with hope.

*Marjolaine CHEVALLIE, from Strasbourg*



## Praying for Peace

Online, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2022

Women members and friends of EFECW met online on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2022, to pray together in solidarity.

In solidarity we pray. Gathered and scattered we come together in our fear and our hope. May justice and peace join hands. For if Christ's disciples stay silent these stones will shout aloud.

Loving God, We pray for the people of Ukraine

Loving God, We pray for the people of Ukraine, for all those suffering or afraid, that you will be close to them and protect them.

We pray for world leaders, for compassion, strength and wisdom to guide their choices.

We pray for the world that in this moment of crisis, we may reach out in solidarity to our brothers and sisters in need.

May we walk in your ways so that peace and justice become a reality for the people of Ukraine and for all the world. Amen

In our darkness there is no darkness, with you, O Lord, the deepest night is clear as the day

Lord we come before you, not alone, but in the company of one another.

We share happiness with each other – and it becomes greater.

We share our troubles with each other – and they become smaller.

We share one another's griefs and burdens – and their weight becomes possible to bear.

For in giving and receiving, we learn to love and be loved;

We encounter the meaning of life, the mystery of existence.

**The Chief Rabbi of Ukraine has asked for Christians to recite Psalm 31 aloud.**

### Prayer of Hildegard of Bingen

God, You came to earth to heal, where fear and mistrust is spreading

You came to earth to comfort, where hopelessness and loneliness is felt

You came to earth among the outcasts and marginalized

We pray to you:

Give us the courage to face illness and death, and never give up

Give us the vigour to spread hope where fear darkens the world

Give us the strength to encourage people who feel lonely and excluded

God, we know that we are connected as women of faith through your Spirit

Even across the borders between us.

### Our Father who art in Heaven

We – the women of EFECW, we will not turn away. We will stand together

We will pray unceasingly for our Ukrainian sisters and the people of Ukraine

We pray for all those who are afraid; that your everlasting arms hold them in this time of great fear.

We will pray for refugees and hold out our hands towards them.

We will pray for those who choose war; that they will remember that you direct your people to turn our swords into ploughshares and seek for peace.

God give us the strength to protect peace.

Lord have mercy. Amen

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. Amen





**EFECW**

ECUMENICAL FORUM OF EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN WOMEN

**INVITATION**

**ZOOM MEETING**

**10 May 2022, 18:00-19:30 CET**

Dear NCs and friends of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women!

The CC invites you to a zoom Meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2022, 18:00-19:30h CET

**How are we feeling / What can we do in the face of war in Ukraine?**

Keep the conversation going!

Admittedly, this is difficult right now, because of our different points of view.

Many of us feel helpless, unsure, or anxious; others are hurt and directly affected.

How are you feeling currently? Let's confide in each other.

This exchange in small groups is not about positions but about listening.

The meeting will be held in English if you need translation, we will try to accommodate.

Sign up until **8 May 2022** by email: [info@efecw.net](mailto:info@efecw.net)

The **zoom link** will be sent on **9<sup>th</sup> May 2022**.





## News from EFECW members

### World Day of Prayer 2022, Zemun, Serbia



On 4<sup>th</sup> March 2022, in Zemun (Serbia), women believers and members of various Christian denominations gathered and took part in an ecumenical prayer within the World Day of Prayer “I Know the Plans I have for you” – Jeremiah 29: 1 -14 written by the World Day of Prayer Committee of England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

They were highly honored that due to the pandemic time

and all the restrictions in the country, they could still gather and attend the ecumenical prayer for peace.

Unfortunately we confess that in the current world around us there are many who suffer and face grave challenges. We strongly stand in solidarity with them in compassion and by practicing loving kindness to ourselves and all those around us.

In this time and in any time, our deepest hope and love, our most gracious and tender prayer, is that we learn to listen and to help. May we listen to one another in openness!

We are thankful for many blessings. We will continue our prayers our and actions. We hope to be one in unity. One in love, understanding and peace. May our prayers be multiplied in many countries!



*Jelena Ljubenović (article)*

*Photo credit: Slobodan Bibić*

## Re-launching the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women in Spain

18th January 2022, online

At 5:30 p.m., and by ZOOM, 14 women (and one man) met. Several colleagues apologised for their absence before and after the meeting, including Mireia Vidal, who currently lives in Scotland and who is planning to be involved in the organisation. All participants were Catholics (but from different backgrounds and groups), except Evelina (Armenian Orthodox) and Mireia (Protestant). The assistance of Andrea Toca stands out, invited from Mexico, who will accompany us in the future Meeting.

The meeting started with an introduction of the attendees. Then Evelina Hryhorian presented the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women in Europe, followed by a brief presentation of the history of the "Forum" in Spain. The presence of Eva Gómez Pina, at this point, was emotional.

Then attendees expressed their opinions and interest in being part of such an entity at this time as well as ways to move forward and forms of linkage to be created:

- physically and telemetrically visit communities and churches to inform them that the Forum resumes its activity in Spain
- we remember the interest of the meeting held in Madrid on September 16 and 17, 2016. Although with little attendance, in addition to the companions of the French Forum, an evangelical pastor and a Muslim theologian, a representative of the Catholic Diocese of Madrid participated
- in that meeting we agree that participation can be individual or as a group representative (for example, Hugo Castelli, representative of Christian Networks in Europe, wrote to us previously to offer himself in this regard). The volume of work of our home groups and the situation of the pandemic require forms that involve less work and more functionality.
- meeting point on the network (WEB, Blog or to be determined) for information on the activities of the Forum in Europe and to connect our work in this regard
- preparation of the Meeting on CREATION AND FUTURE. We already had the presence of the Brazilian theologian Ivone Gebara, but the pandemic stopped it. We will resume via ZOOM.

At the end of the meeting, there was unanimous consensus in approving that Evelina and Pilar as National Coordinators to start working.



The meeting ended with a prayer: in remembrance of Christmas, and with a flavor for the Orthodox Epiphany, which shares with the Catholic tradition its love for candles. The attendees lit a Jerusalem candle, and read I John 15-17: God as Light, and how living in the Light we live in communion. Then, we read Matthew 5, 14: We are witnesses of the Light. And on that call, the meeting closed "In the name of the God Who enlightens us and in Whom we are light and witnesses of His light of Him."

*Pilar Yuste, National Coordinator EFECW Spain*

**Spanish EFECW praying for peace in Ukraine**  
**International Day of Prayer for Peace in Ukraine**

Chers sœurs et frères en Christ !

Le pape François a déclaré le 26 janvier 2022 Journée mondiale de prière pour l'Ukraine.

Comme nous le savons, nous traversons un moment très difficile à la frontière entre l'Ukraine et la Russie, qui depuis plus d'un mois y a rassemblé ses troupes et son important équipement militaire.

Pendant douze heures, de 9h00 à 21h00, toute l'Ukraine sera couverte par la chaîne spirituelle mondiale de protection de la prière, veillée de prière pour la paix, contre la guerre qui la menace.

Nous vous encourageons, où que vous soyez, à joindre cette protection spirituelle à votre prière sincère, car nous sommes Un Corps du Christ, où chaque âme, comme les cellules du corps, est connectée les unes aux autres.

NOUS PRIONS...

+++

Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, Dieu est Bleu dans les cieux et sur la terre,

Vous êtes propriétaire de tous les royaumes et nations.

Entre vos mains il y a de la Force, et personne ne peut vous résister.

Tu es assis sur des chérubins, et des séraphins chantent sans cesse pour toi, alors que peut faire un homme contre toi ?

Inclinez, Seigneur, votre oreille et écoutez; Regarde avec Tes yeux et vois les mauvaises intentions de nos ennemis.

Nous croyons que tu es le seul miséricordieux et fort, et que tu peux nous délivrer de leurs mains.

Donnez la paix et la paix au peuple d'Ukraine qui aime Dieu et ne nous quittez pas à cause de nos péchés.

Car nous nous souvenons des paroles de notre Sauveur, ton Fils unique, et de notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ : "Tous ceux qui ont pris l'épée périront par l'épée."

Par conséquent, ce n'est pas dans nos armes, mais seulement en toi et en ton pouvoir que nous mettons l'espoir.

Vous faites des miracles, vous gagnez et vous perdez.

Donnez à l'Ukraine le meilleur de notre monde homogène, protégez son peuple de la guerre et de l'invasion des opposants, et tout est bon au profit de leur nourriture spirituelle et corporelle.

Parce que tu es le Dieu de Miséricorde, roi du monde et Sauveur de nos âmes, et nous t'envoyons gloire au Père, au Fils et au Saint-Esprit, maintenant et toujours, et à jamais.

Amen.



*Evelina Hrihorian, National Coordinator EFECW Spain*



**Open letter to Christian Women in Ukraine,**  
Austrian EFECW, Vienna, Austria

Dear Sisters,

It is with deep concern and growing apprehension that we hear about the increasing threat in the Ukraine. We worry for the people who live between the fronts, especially the elderly, the women and men as well as the children. The situation seems increasingly confusing and dangerous.

As Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women in Austria with decades of contacts, friendships, with Christian women in Eastern Europe, we feel especially connected to our sisters in Ukraine today. With this letter, we express our solidarity and offer, where it is in our power, to lend a helping hand in a process of de-escalation.

Please let us know where you think we can be of help, whether by providing a platform for dialogue or other practical arrangements.

We are fully aware, of the complexity of the situation - but do not let us loose hope!

We trust in God's Greatness and therefore we believe that connecting and interacting between individuals and communities across borders ensure a brighter future for all.

United in thoughts and prayers we, the National Coordinators, greet you cordially,

Pastor Barbara Heyse-Schaefer and Gabi Kienesberger

On behalf of the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women in Austria

Vienna, 22.2.2022



EFECW Co-ordinating Committee has published a [statement](https://www.efecw.net/images/news/EFECW-Ukraine-Statement.pdf) on the war in Ukraine  
(Read more: <https://www.efecw.net/images/news/EFECW-Ukraine-Statement.pdf> ).

## International Women's Day

### Council of Europe: #BreakTheBias starts with men

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Council of Europe Secretary General Marija Pejčinović Burić underlines that to achieve gender equality, men should make more effort to promote equal pay for equal work.

Pay trends in some Council of Europe member states over a recent 12-year period reflect improvements in the gender pay gap. Eurostat, for example, reported a drop in the gender pay gap in the Czech Republic from just over 26% in 2008, to less than 16.5% in 2020. In Cyprus, the figure stood at 19.5% in 2008, but it fell to less than half – at nine per cent – by 2020. But not all news is good.

Over the same period, little or no change has been reported for other countries. And for the 27 EU member states, only one in three members of national governments and parliaments, regional executives and assemblies and local councils were women in 2020.

To realise equal pay for equal work, men must take action. Whether as work-mates, employers, decision-makers, law enforcers or advocates for change – as brothers, husbands, fathers and sons – they should raise pay gap awareness. We can start with stopping harmful gender-based stereotypes and sexism that often lead to unequal pay. Sexism is a strategic priority of the current Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy. The Council of Europe promotes equality between women and men as a human right, inscribed into many of our legal instruments. Our Committee of Ministers adopted a declaration last year calling on all member states to ensure equal pay for equal work, but we can only succeed with more support from the men in our world. Both men and women can support effective legal action that warns companies to uphold equal pay principles.



Take for example a UK employment tribunal earlier this year that awarded female banker Stacey Macken 2.1 million-pounds (£2.52 million). It was one of the largest awards ever made by a UK employment tribunal for sex discrimination on equal pay. The ruling sent the important message that corporations should solve claims of discrimination internally rather than pay expensive courtroom costs. The Council of Europe can support member states to ensure access to veritable remedies for victims of pay discrimination, to promote pay transparency with relevant statistics including pay comparisons and to adopt comprehensive strategies to promote gender equality in employment. Equal and non-discriminatory access to jobs and careers would bring in a more gender-balanced pool of expertise. Everyone who is willing to work should have the opportunity to get ahead. I welcome economies that include fair pay for women, because when women succeed, we all succeed.

## Religions for Peace, statement

On the occasion of International Women's Day, 8 March 2022, we leaders of diverse faiths, beliefs, traditions and spiritualities, from different countries around the world, come together to acknowledge the crucial role that women have in promoting "gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow."

We acknowledge that women disproportionately suffer—as they have throughout history—the consequences of violent conflict, discrimination, poverty, and restrictions on their freedoms. Yet we also know that women bear significant responsibilities and are the first to respond in situations of social and political unrest that, as we witness with distress, are unfolding in so many corners of our world today.

Many women are motivated and strengthened by their faith. Yet, their experiences, stories, knowledge, wisdom, and myriad forms of expertise are too frequently unrecognised and remain underutilized in decision-making contexts.

For over 50 years, Religions for Peace has brought together diverse faith leaders, communities, and institutions to advance gender equality and equip women and girls with the resources that they need to thrive. The impact of the global pandemic on women and girls has only reinforced the urgency of working together towards gender equality, which is one of Religions for Peace's strategic priorities identified in our international movement of faith communities, leaders, and institutions from over 90 countries and regions.

As we work together, we also know, beyond a shadow of doubt, that faiths, collaborating in service, are a powerful force for a just, peaceful, and harmonious coexistence. There is no comparable or parallel force of nature than that of all faiths uniting for positive peace.

On this International Women's Day, we unite our voices to:

- Acknowledge the injustice that has been done to women through patriarchal interpretations of our religions that contributed to promoting a perception of women as being of lesser value and possessing less mental and spiritual capacity than men.
- Recognize the efforts of all women—and men—who work for peace in families and communities, in every corner of our world;
- Commit to being accountable to support the voices, efforts, and leadership of women in our communities and throughout the world;

As we continue our work toward gender equality and women's empowerment during this time of multiple global challenges, we remember also to pray for those still suffering from the many impacts of gender-based inequities and violence.

We reaffirm our commitment to the Religions for Peace mission and purpose: of serving together, for the common good, so as to leave no one behind.





## Church and Women's organisations: War in Ukraine

### CEC, LWF, WCRC, WMC - A pall of ashes covers Ukraine: Christians join prayer for peace

On Ash Wednesday, 2 March, Christians from around the globe joined in a powerful prayer service of lament and solidarity with all those suffering from the effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The online ecumenical service included participation by Ukrainian pastors and parishioners living in towns and cities that have been under attack since Russian warplanes, tanks and troops began a coordinated assault along Ukraine's eastern border last week.

The service of prayer and chant, Lenten reflections and personal testimonies was jointly organized by various Christian world communions including the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the Conference of European Churches (CEC), the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), the World Methodist Council (WMC), the Mennonite World Conference (MCM) and the Anglican Communion.

In her introductory words, LWF's General Secretary, Rev. Anne Burghardt decried "the cynical politics" of those who have "thrown the world back into times to which we had hoped never to return." Speaking of the "horrors of war and displacement," she said "A pall of ashes covers Ukraine. The claim of God calls humanity into responsibility: Where is your brother, Cain? We want to shout this claim into the hearts and minds of those responsible for all this violence."



### Beat swords into ploughshares

Over three thousand people from 80 countries took part in the liturgy, sharing prayers for peace from all the different continents. Reflecting on the passage from the prophet Micah about the need to beat "swords in ploughshares and [...] spears into pruning hooks," Rev. Dr Hanns Lessing, WCMC's Acting General Secretary, said these words have inspired peacemakers for almost 3,000 years. Peacemaking is hard work, he said, but all churches are called to this task today. Speaking on behalf of all the world communions gathered for the event, he added: "We are committed to supporting the churches in Ukraine, now and in the difficult days ahead."

Testimonies from different parts of Ukraine included Rev. Alexander Shevchenko of the United Methodist Church in Luhansk, the city on the Russian border which has been in conflict since 2014. He prayed for peace between Russians and Ukrainians and for wise decisions by government leaders in the region and beyond. Bishop Pavlo Shvarts of the German Lutheran Evangelical Church in Ukraine spoke from near the besieged city of Kharkiv, calling for a just peace and for aggressors and victims to be named as part of that process.

Pastor Alexey from the Mennonite church in the south-eastern port city of Berdyansk showed empty streets and closed shops, saying that fuel has been rationed and there are concerns about the availability of food and medicine if the conflict continues. Kriszta Bado from the Reformed church in the western Transcarpathian region, spoke movingly of the thousands of people fleeing across the border into Hungary where pastors and congregations are mobilizing to take care of these refugees.

Taras Diatlik of the World Evangelical Alliance in western Ukraine and Marek Glodek of the Polish Baptist Union gave thanks for the organization of churches that are supporting people at this time of need, including help for students and seminarians fleeing abroad or to safer locations. Fr Mykola Danilevich from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate, in the capital Kiev, said that up to 80 people are sheltering underground in his parish each night to escape from the bombings. "We stay with our people," he said, thanking all his Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic colleagues who were calling to offer continual prayers and support.

The service concluded with a plea for Christians to bring hope through prayers and action at this time of crisis. Rev. Dr J.C. Park, President of the World Methodist Council, condemned what he called "a new cold war" and "the despicable propaganda of nuclear weapons." César Garcia, General Secretary of the Mennonite World Conference, said people of faith are called to "embody hope for others," just as the first Christian communities did, standing up against conflict and oppression in their day.



*CEC, Naveen Qayyuu, CEC, 5<sup>th</sup> March 2022*



## CCEE, "In the name of God, stop"



From Florence, where the "Frontier of Peace" meeting is currently taking place, His Excellence Msgr Gintaras Grušas, Archbishop of Vilnius and President of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) makes a heartfelt appeal for peace in Ukraine.

The Churches in Europe strongly condemn what has happened tonight in Ukraine. We must act together and with determination to put an immediate end to the Russian aggression and to do everything possible to protect innocent women, men and children: in the name of God, stop now!

The international community, and the European Union in particular, should leave no stone unturned to stop this conflict, that the weapons will give way to dialogue and negotiations, and so that international law and the independence and territorial sovereignty of Ukraine are defended. We must strive to end a war that would inevitably spread from Ukraine to neighbouring states and become a threat to the whole of Europe.

The European bishops and the Christian communities pray for the victims of this conflict and for their families. They unite with those who are suffering from these acts of violence and they join Pope Francis' call for prayer and fasting for peace: "May the Queen of Peace preserve the world from the madness of war".

*CCEE, Florence, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022*

### **Appeal to Europe for the situation in Ukraine**

The Presidency of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences, giving voice to the Bishops of the European Continent in this dramatic moment of tension around Ukraine, wishes to express its closeness to the Churches in Ukraine and to all its people. They invite the international community to offer its support to the country in the face of the danger of a Russian military offensive.

While the entire international community interprets the actions of the Russian military forces as a real threat to peace throughout the world, we embrace in this time of fear and uncertainty for the future of the country our brothers and sisters in the faith and all the people of Ukraine.

We have heard the voice of the Holy Father Francis, who has repeatedly expressed his paternal closeness to the "beloved Ukraine", urging the powerful in the world to resolve the crisis through "serious dialogue and not with arms" (Angelus of 12.12.2021). Moreover, in his recent Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, he stressed that "Reciprocal trust and readiness to engage in calm discussion should also inspire all parties at stake, so that acceptable and lasting solutions can be found in Ukraine..." (Audience with the Diplomatic Corps on 10.01.2022)

We also, as shepherds of the European Continent, want to appeal to the Leaders of the Nations so that they do not forget the tragic World Wars of the last century and so that international law as well as the independence and territorial sovereignty of each country will be defended. Together with the Holy Father, we want to call on Governments to find "acceptable and lasting solutions" in Ukraine based on dialogue and negotiation and without resorting to arms.

At this extremely delicate time, we ask Christians to pray for the gift of peace in Ukraine so that those responsible may be filled with, and radiate, a peace that is "and that the crisis will be overcome exclusively through dialogue.

*CCEE, St. Gallen, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2022*



## Religions for Peace: Statement on the Ukraine Conflict

United in the dignity of our diversity, every member of Religions of Peace from across the world sends their prayers and love to all those caught up in the latest senseless round of violence and conflict currently taking place in Ukraine.

As an organization founded on a deep religious conviction for peace, inherent in all our traditions, we unreservedly reject any form of violence. We know in our hearts and minds, and from bitter experience, that violent conflict can never result in any positive outcomes.

We reject the invocation of defending religion or tradition as a pretext for war.

We pray with all our strength for every single person involved in the conflict.

We pray for the children, women and men who been killed and injured, and who are fleeing from their homes in sheer terror at what has happened. We appeal to all parties to help guarantee a humanitarian corridor for the safe evacuation of civilians and the delivery of much needed aid.

We pray for the citizens of Ukraine and Russia, who through no fault of their own will now suffer both spiritually and materially for decades to come. Violence breeds violence, and they will need much support to recover from the fear, insecurity, bitterness, and trauma that inevitably follows violent conflict.

We pray for our brothers and sisters in the Russian Orthodox Church, the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (UCCRO), the Interreligious Council of Russia (ICR), the believers of their religious denominations, and for people of every religion in the region, and call on them to remember the fundamental purpose and nature of all religions and stand up and speak out for peace.

We pray for the political leaders. We hope with all our hearts that they pause long enough to recall the essence and goodness of their humanity, and the preciousness of every single human life on this planet. We ask them to remember their sworn duty to protect the lives of every human being under their leadership, and immediately cease this senseless violence.

We pray for all those around the world who have come out to protest this war and to demand an immediate end to this violence.

As an organization dedicated to peace and the prosperity of everyone, Religions for Peace reaffirms its belief that advocating for a non-violent resolution to this crisis is an expression of our shared spiritual commitment to a just and sustainable peace.

Continuing our commitment to deeply held, shared beliefs in the obligation to collaborate as faith communities to support the most vulnerable, the Multi-Religious Humanitarian Fund of Religions for Peace will call for proposals to support interfaith initiatives that provide aid to those displaced by conflict. We call on other religious and secular civil society organizations to support collaborative action to protect those who are harmed by war.

*28 February 2022*

**Religions for Peace**



## Ecumenical Women's Initiative and Believers for Peace: Call for Peace



As sisters to sisters, brothers to brothers, as mothers to mothers, fathers to fathers, we are writing to you from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Northern Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo.

We are believers who have experienced the violence of war and who today are still working to build peace as we continue to wrestle with the consequences of war in our countries. This experience brings us close to you who today suffer war, separation, fear and dread for the

lives of your loved ones. That experience does not allow us to be silent, that experience gives weight to our cries against war which come from the depths of our souls. ENOUGH WAR, NO MORE, NEVER AGAIN.

We want you to know that we are close to you in solidarity, that we think of you, that we pray for you and that it pains us to feel powerless, to be unable to do more for you. As believers, Christians and Muslims know that peace is God's will and that God upholds peacemakers. We know that peace is not built by weapons but by human relations, not by the might of the strongest but by justice for all, and especially for those weaker and more vulnerable among us. We know that peace is possible, that peace requires effort and that it is worth it.

Do not let war turn your soul. We pray for ourselves and we also wish that we are not overwhelmed by a warrior's desire for revenge, that we are not poisoned by the instigation of war and the illusion that the extermination of the enemy will bring a solution to war. Our commitment to peace has taken us out of the vicious circle of war. This long-term journey that is not without obstacles and difficulties in a world polluted by violence and injustice gives meaning and joy to our lives. We wish the same to you.

We call on representatives of our churches, Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant communities, representatives of the Islamic community in our countries as well as in Ukraine and Russia to take responsibility based on the reputation and trust on which their communities have in them. As believers, we are committed to peace. The same is true for our religious representatives, that their commitment is fully maximised and all their potential used to stop the war and build peace.

- We ask of our religious representatives to reach out to their contacts, friendships, acquaintances and areas of influence in the cause of peace.
- We ask of our religious representatives to be actively involved in seeking and finding space for dialogue between today's conflicting sides.
- We ask them to initiate and support a living dialogue in order to find ways for the transformation of the conflict today to ensure the life of all citizens in a peaceful neighbourhood tomorrow.

Our task is to build peace. We ask our religious representatives to accept these tasks and to perform them with heart and soul. Let us be God's instruments of peacebuilding today - to the joy of the whole world.

**Ecumenical Women's Initiative** Reg. 22547651  
Četvrt kralja Slavca 3  
21310 Omiš – Croatia  
E: eiz@eiz.hr  
T: +385 21 862 599

**Believers for Peace (RAND)**  
Plehanska 2  
10360 Sesvete - Croatia  
E: randnenasilje@rand.hr  
T: +385 1 205 8696



**The night is nearly over; the day has drawn near (1John 2,8)**

Thank you and glory to you, creator of time!

You who are perfect light

Today I pray:

Enlighten my soul to remain pure

and stay awoken in prayer

Save my joyful heart and renew the strength of faith

by which I surrender to You

You are the master of all authorities.

Creator of love, protect us from fear and pride

and help us to love each other.

And we are grateful to You

Amen

*Marijana Ajzenkol, EFECW Co-President*





*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))

---

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).

---

*Thank you for reading our newsletter! Follow us also on [www.efecw.net](http://www.efecw.net) and facebook. Please make our newsletter more informative and inclusive by incorporating news/ info from you:*

[info@efecw.net](mailto:info@efecw.net)