



EFECW

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

NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2025



Dear Sisters,

We bring to you the Summer edition of the Forum Newsletter, as a season of warmth and growth. But against this summer we know there are long shadows of war, violence, climate change, injustice, and division. We live in times that are shaped by grief and loss. But as women of faith, we are also shaped by hope, resilience, and a commitment to walk together - pilgrims for peace and justice.

This newsletter reflects the rich and varied life of our Forum. From powerful accounts of protest and advocacy in Serbia and France, we see women daring to speak truth and claim space. The Young

Women share their Open Space discussions on theological, social, political and intimate themes.

One thread running through this edition is the power of the body - its strength, its pain, its wisdom. Whether in conversations about reproductive justice, biblical texts on menstruation, or the embodied prayers of pilgrimage, we are reminded that our bodies matter in the life of the church. We also celebrate the enduring power of wonder - how awe and beauty sustain us amid harsh realities, as shared so beautifully by the French Forum.

We honour the work of the Austrian Forum, whose story reminds us of what can be achieved when ecumenical women raise their voices over decades, even as we grieve the formal closing of the national association. Their legacy will live on in our shared Forum, and in the spirit of interfaith and intergenerational dialogue they have helped to nurture.

May this newsletter be a space for reflection, encouragement, and solidarity. As we look toward the next General Assembly, may we continue to ask: what does it mean to pilgrimage together in these times? How do we walk with courage, joy, and conviction as women of faith - across borders, generations, and traditions?

In peace,

The Coordinating Committee of the EFECW

Photo-credit: Anne Marie Schott

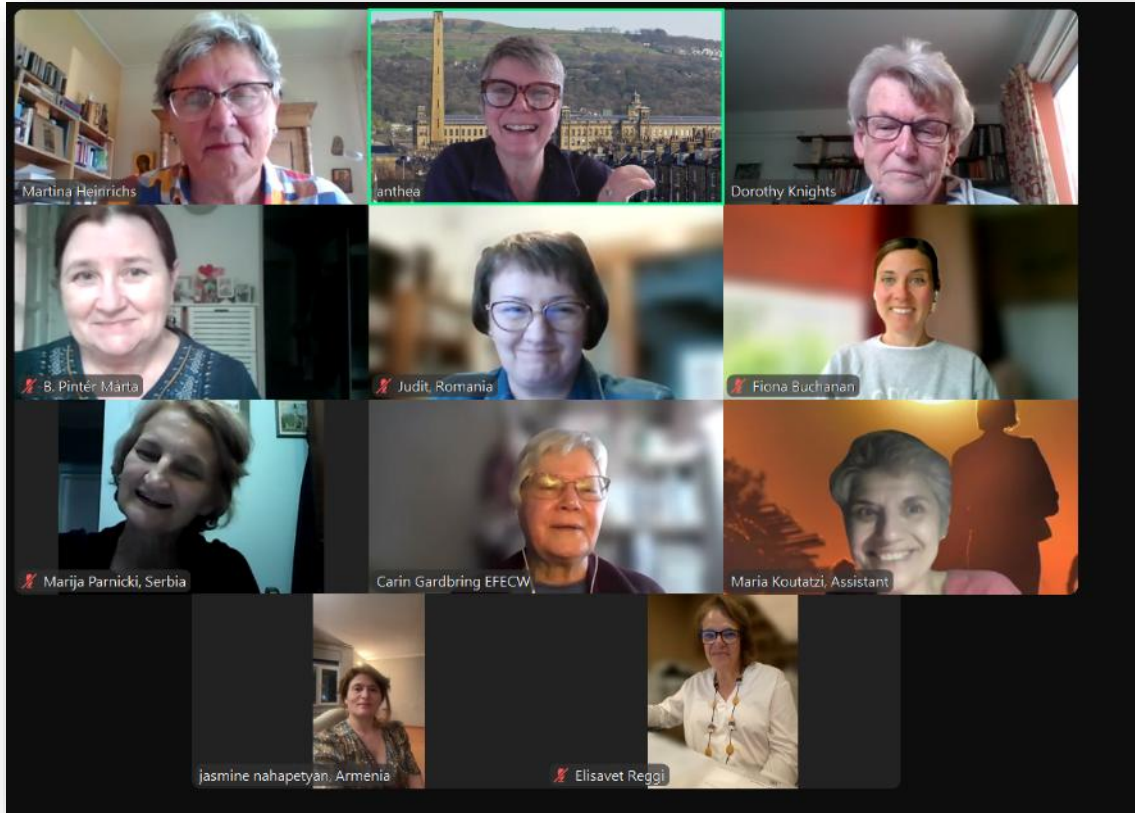


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National Coordinators' meeting

Online, 8th May 2025



Around 25 women from 16 Forums and countries met online to, listen, vote, talk, and pray together, for almost three hours. This new way of having a business meetings for the Forum was introduced officially at EFECW General Assembly in 2022 (Strasbourg). The narrative and financial reports for 2024 were well received and approved. Future plans were presented concerning the Young Women's Open Space monthly meetings, and study session with the Ecumenical Youth Council of Europe (EYCE), the Climate Change Response Initiative, or the representation work at the Council of Europe as well as ordinary activities such as the Online National Coordinators' (business) meeting or Extraordinary General Assembly 2026, the General Assembly in Marburg, Germany, September 2026. The delegates discussed the process of the EFECW constitutional change, including a period for national deliberations.

The Coordinating Committee



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EFECW Young Women's activity

February Open Space

Female pleasure and orgasm

"Every curve of a woman's body tells a story of strength, resilience, and sensuality..."

During our February Open Space Discussion for Young Women, we had the honor of hosting Zany, who spoke on the topic of female pleasure and orgasm. In an interactive atmosphere, the importance of pleasure in a woman's life was discussed. In an educational way, the participants had the opportunity to discuss numerous topics, which are taboo in many societies.

While orgasms can provide a direct reproductive benefit, pleasure helps improve the mood and relieve stress. We talked about what happens during an

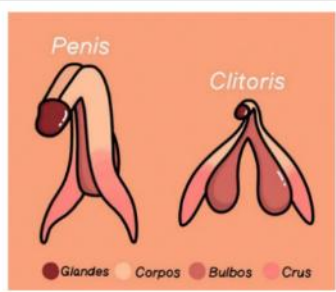
orgasm, why female orgasms matter, health benefits, common misconceptions, and many other topics in the sphere of women's worlds, which are not talked about so much. Most people are familiar with the thing that the female orgasm is often characterized as mysterious and hard to reach, but that doesn't have to be true. The female orgasm is a pretty amazing thing.



Interoception

The ability to sense what is happening inside your body

WE ALL HAVE THE SAME PARTS



There's so much to understand about female orgasms, including what happens to your body when you have one. If we wanted to define what female orgasm means, we would say that female orgasm represents one of the body's responses to reaching the height of sexual arousal. There are no two orgasms that are the same. They can vary in length and intensity. When a person orgasms, her brain

releases a surge of dopamine, the feel-good hormone. This helps a person to recognize what she enjoys and gives her that sense of pleasure. Her brain also releases oxytocin. This is sometimes called the bonding hormone because it triggers a sense of love and attachment. It is essential to explore your own body, be in the moment, and try to relax as much as possible.



Types of Orgasms

1. Clitoral Orgasm
2. Vaginal Orgasm
3. Combined Orgasm
4. Anal Orgasm
5. Cervical Orgasm
6. Multiple Orgasms
7. Nipple Orgasm
8. Mental or Psychological Orgasm
 - Exercise-Induced Orgasm ('Coregasm')
 - Brain Orgasm (ASMR)
9. Energetic Orgasm
10. Full-Body Orgasm (tantra or sensations)
11. 0.3% of women experience orgasm during childbirth

Benefits of orgasm

- Relieving menstrual cramps
- Reducing stress
- Improving sleep
- Helps strengthen pelvic muscles
- Can improve reproductive health
- Boosts your immune system
- Lowers your blood pressure
- Improves cardiovascular health
- Increases libido
- Works your pelvic floor
- Protects your brain
- Burns calories



Numerous studies show several health benefits of female orgasm, like reduced stress, better sleep quality, visible self-confidence, easing period cramps, etc. There is a beautiful saying:

"In the dance of life, a woman's sensuality is her most graceful movement."

Let your life be your dance floor, and your feminine energy the most beautiful movement performed.

Jelena Ljubenović, EFECW CC member

Photo credit: screenshots of PPT slides prepared by Zany



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March Open Space

Pilgrimage, General Assembly and other future visions

In our meeting in March, Hannah presented to us ideas concerning the concept for the next GA coming up next year in early September 2026. It is a core goal to encourage members using travel options with less impact on the environment and reducing flights. Therefore, a rather central meeting place (maybe Marburg, Germany) and promoting joint traveling are key elements of planning the GA. Traveling together is in Christianity connected to a special tradition: pilgrimage. Of course, a pilgrimage is more than visiting friends, but so is the GA of our forum! How then can we develop a concept of a pilgrimage-GA which reflects the spirit and vision of our forum and leads us into fruitful community?

Elisabeth pilgrimage in Germany



Destination: Marburg

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrCyNICem_I

<https://www.jugendherberge.de/jugendherbergen/marburg/>

<https://begegnungszentrum-sonneck.de/>

<https://www.elisabethpfad.de/>

Lively we discussed several key questions. What is a pilgrimage about and have we ever participated in one (only very few of us have...)? Can we all travel certain routes joining each other and walk the last two days together (or in two groups coming from north and south or east and west)? Can people go by bike, bus or train without feeling excluded? How many days should we spend doing our pilgrimage? How long will we stay at our final destination, which topics will we explore? How is it possible to share different Christian traditions around pilgrimage and to create a (joint) spiritual experience? Is pilgrimage in itself a suitable topic? Which topic is to be chosen to attract young women? What kind of vision for the GA, for the forum do we as young women in our forum long for?



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Pilgrimage means and activities?



I would say, the pilgrimage has already started! In our hearts and minds a dream unfolds, a little seed is starting to grow... Can't we focus on spiritually rooted people who strive for a feminist world – and therefore a world moving towards justice...? Ecumenical Forum of Spiritual Feminists? How does this sound to you? Personally, I resonate strongly with this idea. We persistently need to speak and act on gender related violence and inequality. We cannot play off women's needs against those of non-binary, trans*. We need allies on the way towards this vision. The journey of our forum which set out to connect women despite divisive wall, iron curtain and ideologies is to be continued according to the demands of our time. Let's dream and act and pilgrimage together – towards our GA and towards a world reflecting that G*d created the world so that justice and peace would kiss.

Hannah Kehrein

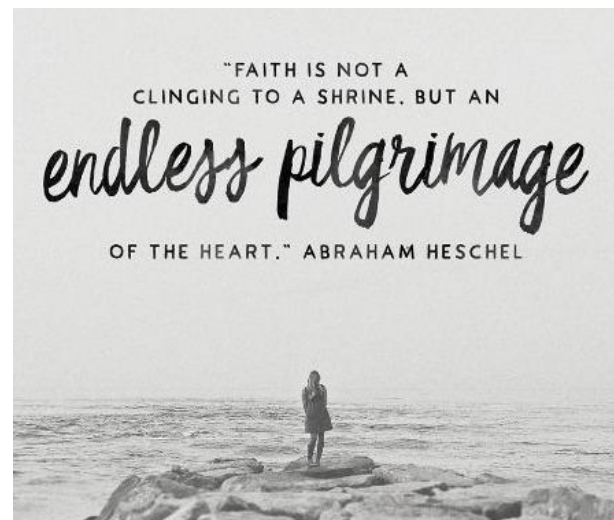


Photo credit 1+2: Screenshots of PPP slides created by Hannah Wehner

Photo credit: <https://i.pinimg.com/736x/5f/66/2e/5f662ec086de2d1fd2997ef2e3c605a9.jpg>



April Open Space

Protests in Serbia

Our Open Space discussion on 27th April 2025 was led by CC member and co-organiser of the Open Spaces, Jelena, who spoke about **“The Current Situation in Serbia”**.

We began with an icebreaker by sharing our Easter traditions and how we celebrated this year. This was followed by quotes about protests and the idea that no one is ever too small to make a difference. What I took away from these inspirational words was that change **is** possible—even if it takes time, it’s important to keep working towards your goals.

We all listened attentively as Jelena explained the history behind the ongoing protests in her home country, Serbia.

In November 2024, a tragic event occurred at the Novi Sad railway station: a concrete canopy collapsed, resulting in the deaths of 15 people. This disaster sparked public outrage and led to widespread, student-led protests demanding accountability, transparency, and an end to corruption in the current government, led by Aleksandar Vučić.

4/6

The students' demands have broadened beyond the incident:

1. Arrest of Those Responsible: Arrest all officials responsible for the Novi Sad disaster and those covering up corruption.	6. Raise Minimum Wage: Increase the minimum wage by 20%.
2. Justice for Protest Violence: Arrest attackers of protesters, charge those who drove into crowds with attempted murder, and replace lenient judges and prosecutors.	7. Guaranteed Purchase of Agricultural Products: Ensure the state buys all agricultural produce at inflation-adjusted prices.
3. Halt Large Construction Projects: Stop major projects like the national stadium, Expo2027, and others, with a technical audit of structures built in the last 10 years.	8. Stop Credit Arrangements: End credit agreements and further detrimental state borrowing.
4. Stop the Jadar Project: Halt the Jadar lithium project and all mining projects in preparation, with strict environmental controls on active mines.	9. Cease Arms Exports: Stop exporting weapons to conflict zones like Israel, Ukraine, and others.
5. Increase Education Budget: A 20% increase in education funding and guaranteeing 70% state-funded spots in universities.	10. Form an Expert Commission for Air Pollution: Create a commission to address and reduce air pollution.

→

Photo credit: PPT-slide created by Jelena Ljubenović



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I found it empowering to hear how entire families are coming together to protest, and how young people are cycling across Europe to raise awareness for their cause. However, I was devastated to learn that the government controls much of the mass media, and that the church is deeply divided on the issue.

Thank you so much, Jelena, for shedding light on this important historical event and movement in Serbia, which mirrors a global shift toward extreme political power plays at the expense of ordinary citizens.

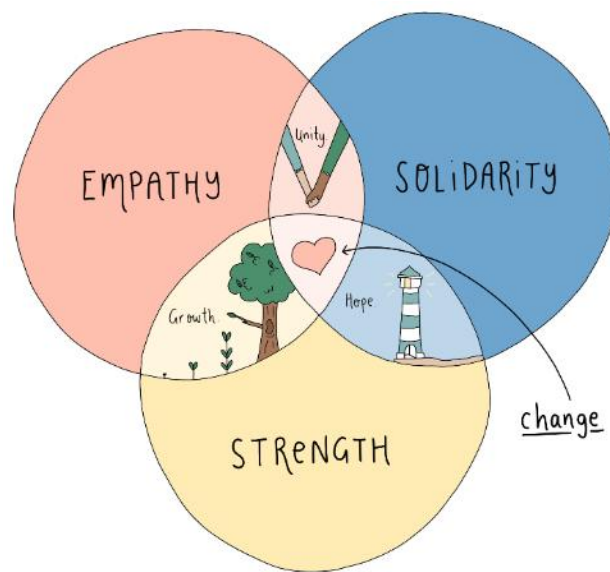


Photo credit: <https://www.wordfinders.club/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/VennDiagram.png>

Agnes Kienesberger



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May Open Space

Menstruation in the Bible

In our session in May we looked at a biblical passage on menstruation. Until today, Leviticus 15 is taken as argument to call menstruating persons, especially women, unclean. Some go as far as to prohibit women for this reason from church ministries.

Our reflection showed how similar the rules for men and women are concerning bodily discharge. The sole association of women with unclean discharges is therefore too narrow (and many translations intensify this impression using not neutral but negative terms for menstruation). Important is nevertheless that people with unclean discharge need to separate from the holy: the temple or the tent of meeting and other people who shall be God's holy people (Leviticus 19).

Then we had a look on the rules applying to people who have taken a Nazirite vow (Numbers 6). Also there, women and men are treated equally. Nazirites are usually associated as holy men (this can be also discovered in many bible translations). Again, a thought which does not represent the biblical rules correctly. Interestingly, there are no rules which exclude menstruating women from taking the holy Nazirite vow. And, both, the one who menstruates and the one who has taken the vow, have in common that they need to be separated.

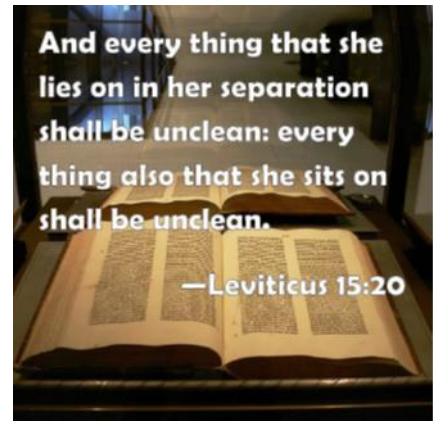
RACHEL SAID TO HER FATHER, "SIR, DO NOT BE ANGRY THAT I CANNOT STAND UP BEFORE YOU; FOR I AM HAVING MY PERIOD." SO LABAN SEARCHED, BUT COULD NOT FIND THE HOUSEHOLD IDOLS.
— GENESIS 31:35

[Photo credit](#)

than many of our bible translations and certain churchy men – so, let's stay critical...!

To light this rather dry topic up, we were inspired by the message song of Women's World Day of Prayer "You are wonderfully made" ([Psalm 139](#)) and the hymn "[Womb of all creation](#)" by Jann Aldrege Clanton. You are cordially invited to let the Spirit inspire you as well!

Hannah Kehrein



[Photo credit](#)



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Study Session

"Youth in Leadership Today: The Pathway Forward"

I had the pleasure and honour to be part of the Team of Trainers for the study session 'Youth in Leadership Today' held by WSCF-E (World Student Christian Federation Europe) from 3-7 March 2025 at the European Youth Centre in Budapest. Throughout the week we discussed different leadership styles, developed an 'ideal' youth leader as we imagine it, reflected on our personal leadership skills and values, put leadership into action, and further enhanced our self-knowledge, awareness, and competencies in interculturality and intersectionality. It was a very enriching and highly enjoyable week that also left some space for an exploration of Budapest.



Group picture, photo credit: WSCF-E



Team of Trainers, photo credit: WSCF-E



Budapest City Tour, photo credit: Melissa Bridi

Hannah Wehner, EFECW CC member



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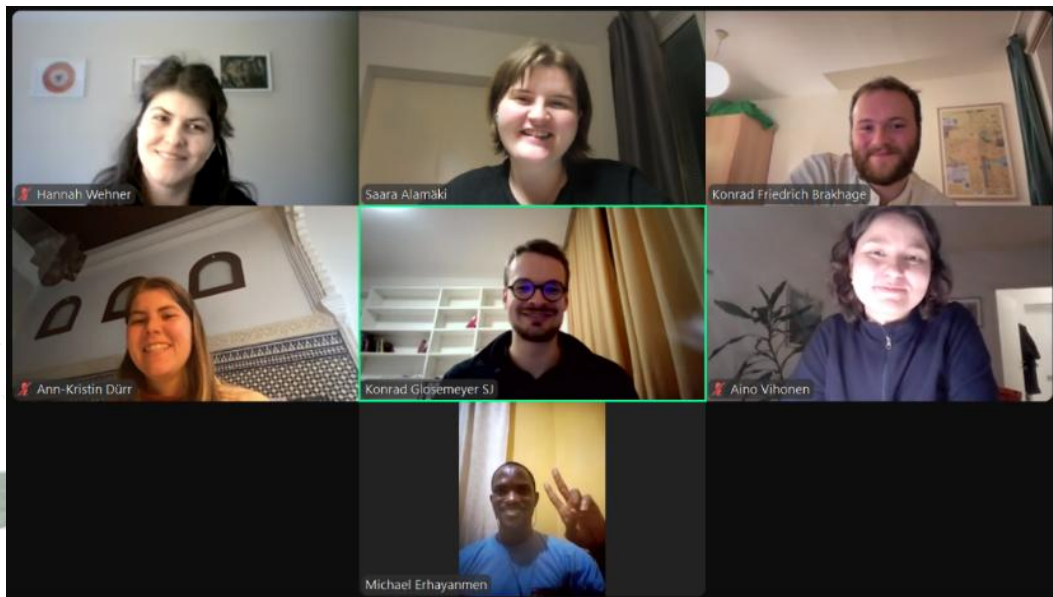
Bible Study sessions

Enhanced collaboration with EYCE

We have the honour to collaborate with EYCE (Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe) in various ways. These include our shared Study Session 'Faith in Action: Addressing Climate Change and Strengthening Democracy Through Christian Youth Movements' due to be held between 1 - 5 September 2025 at the European Youth Centre in Budapest as well as our participation in EYCE events as their monthly Bible Study Sessions. I had the pleasure to join the March session led by guest speaker, Amb. Michael Erhayanmen from Nigeria, the founder of Koret Boys Initiative that promotes reformed approaches to masculinity.



Invitation shared by EYCE



Screenshot by Saara Alamäki, EYCE

Hannah Wehner, EFECW CC member



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Representation at YFJ

General Assembly of the European Youth Forum



[Photo credit](#)

The European Youth Forum, an umbrella organisation of the National Youth Councils and International Youth NGOs in Europe, held its first of two annual General Assemblies from 9-10 May 2025 in Brussels. I was able to participate as an extra delegate together with main delegate for EYCE, joined by over 140 delegates. During the two days, new members of the Advisory

Council on Youth of the Council of Europe were elected and motions on diverse topics such as a calling on the EU for civil protection in Serbia and Turkey were passed next to other agenda points as finances and the admission of further national youth councils.

It was a fascinating and truly inspiring experience that I am very grateful for. It sparked the consideration for me, to apply as EFECW as an Associate Member so that we can send young women to the General Assemblies giving them great opportunities to connect and creating motivation to stay engaged and active. This is something the CC will take on board for their discussions. *Hannah Wehner, EFECW CC member*



Photo credit: Hannah Wehner



Group picture of the Value-Based Cooperation that EYCE is part of – photo credit: Anna Holtkamp



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EFECW Young women

co-organising with EYCE



Preparatory meeting

EYCE-EFECW Study Session

'Faith in Action' in Budapest

From 6 to 7 June our joined team from EYCE and EFECW held the preparatory meeting for our upcoming study session 'Faith in Action' at the European Youth Centre in Budapest. We shared effective working days in which we put an interesting and inspiring programme together for the week. We look forward to getting started in September!

Hannah Wehner, EFECW CC member





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WOMEN IN FAITH

Marguerite de Navarre

Woman of Reformation



Marguerite de Navarre (l. 1492-1549) was a writer, philosopher, diplomat, and Queen of Navarre, sister of King Francois I, mother of Jeanne d'Albret and grandmother of Henry IV of France. She was also a proponent of the Reformation, mediating between Protestants and Catholics in France.

Also known as Margaret of Navarre and Marguerite of Angouleme, she is best known for her *Heptameron* (1558), published posthumously and unfinished

at her death but regarded as one of the most significant works of the Renaissance. She corresponded with some of the greatest Reformers of her time including Martin Luther, Philip Melanchthon, John Calvin, Guillaume Farel, and Marie Dentiere. Marguerite and Dentiere were friends, and she was also close to Anne Boleyn and patronized the work of Leonardo da Vinci, who spent his last years at the chateau she and Francois I provided.

Although she never officially renounced Catholicism, she supported the Protestant Reformation in France, protected Protestant preachers and writers from persecution, and advanced the cause by financing translations of Luther's and Calvin's works, as well as other commentaries on scripture and scripture itself, into French. She supported and protected the Reformer Jacques Lefevre d'Etaples, the first theologian to translate the testament into French, and used her influence with her brother to prevent his arrest and the destruction of his work.

She was an advocate for the poor and for unwed mothers, establishing hospitals, almshouses, and orphanages, while also tending to her responsibilities at court and writing almost constantly. Her letters, poems (especially her *Mirror of the Sinful Soul*), plays, and *Heptameron* continue to be widely read in the present day.

Marguerite was not satisfied with only conversing about religious and philosophical concepts, however, but worked to apply them practically. She encouraged her fellow noblewomen to contribute to building hospitals, orphanages, and almshouses in Alençon and drew up regulations for the institutions mandating regular meals of healthy foods, daily hygiene, and respect for the persons, especially women, who sought shelter at them. Unmarried pregnant women were provided with shelter, food, and support before and after giving birth and any act of molestation or rape was severely punished.

She died of pleurisy in December 1549, and, unlike many of her contemporary female writers, her works were preserved intact and were first published within ten years of her death.

Read more about Marguerite de Navarre in the article by [Joshua J. Mark](#) on the [website](#).

Presented by Marianna Apresyan, EFECW Co-President



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NEWS FROM THE MEMBERS

“Corruption kills us”

Peaceful and academic protests in Serbia

It all started on 1st November 2024, when the canopy at the newly reconstructed railway station in Novi Sad collapsed. At that time, 15 people lost their lives, including children. Underneath the heavy concrete canopy, a young woman 24 years old, mother of a one-year-old girl and a final-year medical student from my village, Kisac, were trapped for almost 48 hours. This is a wound that my fellow villagers could not remain indifferent to.

Kisac is a suburban settlement, located 20 km from Novi Sad. The population of Kisac is primarily engaged in agriculture. Many young people and families rely on farming for their livelihood. Kisac has a well-organized Farmers' Association, which has been fighting for a better position for farmers in Serbia for decades. Why do I mention this? This association and its president initiated and motivated the entire village to actively participate in the general uprising against the corrupt system that has ruled Serbia for decades. Their tractors became the first shield to protect students from attacks and trampling.



Photo credit: Marijana Ajzenkol



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Since that November 1st, 2024, peaceful protests by students began, blocking all universities and demanding, first and foremost, the release of documents related to the reconstruction of the canopy and the punishment of those responsible. The peaceful, mass, and well-organized student protests gradually sparked a general rebellion among hundreds of thousands of people in Serbia, who could no longer tolerate corruption, nepotism, and totalitarianism. The peaceful protests spread and grew larger. Schools joined in, halting their activities. Every Friday, precisely at 11:52 AM, the citizens of Serbia pay tribute to the victims of this tragedy with a fifteen-minute silence. The protests include not only students, who are the majority, but also schoolchildren, teachers, actors, hospitality workers, taxi drivers, journalists, farmers, lawyers, etc. This has been going on for too long, and it is becoming more widespread, threatening to completely block Serbia and its economy. The government initially remains silent, fearing that even more corrupt actions might be uncovered. Several high-ranking state officials have resigned. But the students want more—they demand the abolition of the entire corrupt system that is killing us. The students have shaken the foundations of this society, which is based on corruption and nepotism, and this instills great fear.

The residents of my village are very determined and persistent in supporting the student protests, especially the farmers who participate daily, protecting the students. My family members, along with their tractors, are present at bridges and busy intersections, supporting the students and providing them protection. (There have been sporadic attacks on students and incidents of cars driving into crowds of people.) Our farmers cook hot meals for the students almost every day and organize the collection of financial resources for the survivors. Our women prepare snacks.

Our fellow citizen of Kisac, which was under the canopy, survived, but was amputated and left without both legs and part of her pelvis. Is this not enough of a reason to continue to fight for changes, for ideas that are above all politics and imply healthy and functional institutions, justice and transparency?

We are not alone in this fight. We feel that we are carried by the prayers of believers throughout the region and Europe. As ap. Paulus says:

“You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many”. 2 Corinthians 1,11

Marija Parnicki, Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization (EHO), Novi Sad, Serbia



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The power of wonder, of amazement

News from the French Forum

Following our letter of support for Palestinian Christian women (sent in December 2024), Marie-Eve Fischer came to talk to us about Palestine, which she knows so well having been there and



having forged close links with a family there. Her insight provided us with ways to understand and give substance to what, despite our interest and compassion, remained a little abstract.

At the same time, we could hear the testimony of a Jewish woman, to get 'another side of the story' and to ensure that both sides of the argument were balanced. We invited her to come and share with us what she, as a Jewish woman, is experiencing and feeling after the attack on 7 October 2023 and in the face of anti-Semitic acts (tags etc...). Both moving and enlightening.

We also supported via the association 'Action des Chrétiens en Orient' a hospital in Gaza. Unfortunately it was destroyed!

And over several months we developed the following theme: THE POWER OF WONDER, OF AMAZEMENT

Quotes:

- ❖ 'The end of the world and the bottom of the garden contain the same amount of wonder'. Christian Bobin
- ❖ 'Happy are the eyes that need no illusion to see that the spectacle is great'. Maurice Maeterlinck, Belgian author, Nobel Prize for Literature
- ❖ 'The unexpected is the authentic signature of the divine', Christian Bobin
- ❖ 'Before the sacredness of life and of the human being, before the marvels of the universe, the only adequate attitude is that of wonder', John Paul II in a letter to artists.
- ❖ "Every encounter with an human being is an adventure, a coming of God to us, but it only becomes a special event if we are open to it." Anselm Grün

Bible verses:

- ❖ 'He alone has done wonders, for his love endures forever!' Ps 135
- ❖ 'O Lord our God! How great is your name in all the universe! Ps 8
- ❖ 'Alleluia! Give thanks to Yahweh, for he is good, for his love endures forever!'



- ❖ Give thanks to the God of gods, for his love endures forever!
- ❖ Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his love endures forever! Ps 136
- ❖ 'And his praise cascades like an inexhaustible waterfall, so that none of these marvels escape' Ps 103 and 104
- ❖ 'Yes, we have beheld his glorious splendour, a splendour that only the only Son sent by his Father could possess.' Jn 1.14
- ❖ 'O depth of the riches, wisdom and knowledge of God' Rom 11:33

Reflections

- Wonder, a madness against the tide of this disenchanted world. It's a challenge.
- But especially today, because our world seems grey and egotistical, the power of wonder is to reconnect us, to get us out of our routines and reconnect us to others, to Creation and to God.
- Reconnecting with others by seeing the beauty and goodness in everyone, and marvelling at their abilities and generosity.
- And it's not that simple. We all have that little inclination to be more attentive to obstacles or difficulties than to the little shoots of life that are emerging.
- Every moment of our lives is an opportunity to marvel at the beauty of the world and to connect with something greater than ourselves.
- In this world where performance and profitability are the only things that count, the power of wonder is to give us back our childlike eyes, not naive but free of all the dross that clouds them, and to look around us and those around us with fresh eyes. And to have a fresh eye every time, like the child who marvels at a bug 10 times.
- In this world where we are over-informed, the power of wonder is to enable us to rediscover the deep source of our being.
- Through the power of wonder, we can let ourselves be surprised by the unexpected and the Unexpected, forget the intellect and its learned constructs and let ourselves be invaded by the emotions.
- The power of wonder is that it allows us to let go while being in the present moment. Wonder requires both letting go of our certainties and being attentive to allow ourselves to be surprised.
- To marvel is to be alive.





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- Wonder leads us to jubilation, praise, prayer and meditation.
- Wonder is a door that opens.
- Wonder, the gift of Eastern. Eastern is the unprecedented announcement that life and love have the last word in the human adventure.
- Wonder is an opening to another depth that gives us a glimpse of the mystery of a Beauty that saves us. To love and inhabit the world and our lives with hope and Grace.
- But over time, our God sometimes becomes distant, and we lose our sense of wonder at God's splendour.
- But how can we be filled with wonder on a daily basis despite our suffering, our fears, the uncertain future, wars and violence?
- Terrible misfortunes and abysses of misery remain, but in this desert full of suffering, let us be on the lookout for sources of hope.

In the French Forum, in Strasbourg and in Paris, we reflected and talked about a number of other issues, and each of us talked about what was a source of wonder in our lives.

It was fruitful and this sharing a source of wonder!

Anne Marie Schott, National Coordinator



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The Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women in Austria

An exciting chapter of women's ecumenism comes to an end (1989-2025)

Background

When the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women was founded in 1982, the continent was still divided into East and West by the iron curtain. The economic gap between North and South was very wide. Overcoming these differences and, above all, giving women on the continent and their issues a voice was the aim of the two initiators, the Reformed pastor **Ruth Epting** and the Roman Catholic English woman **Jacqueline Stuyt**. The founding meeting took place in Gwatt, Switzerland. In addition to working for peace and reconciliation - it was the high point of the peace movement - the forum campaigned against trafficking in women, for a responsible approach to creation and for an ecumenical, multicultural and equal life. The aim was to overcome political and denominational European borders and to focus on Europe as a whole.

I first came into contact with the Forum when the first German-speaking conference "Christian Women on the Move" took place in Vienna in 1985. Inge Schintlmeister, the director of Evangelische Frauenarbeit in Österreich (Protestant Women's Association), was involved in the Forum very early on and was one of the co-presidents from 1998-2006. She invited the Roman-catholic theologian Renate Mercanits and myself to the conference for a Bible study on "The Widow and the Lost Penny". All participants introduced themselves with a coin from their country. It was not until many years later that the Euro was to unite most of the member countries of the Forum. The political neutral Austria turned out to be a very favourable intersection between East and West.

In Austria in the 1980s and 1990s, there was a hopeful awakening for change in the churches with regard to women's issues. One trigger were the equal rights for women in 1980 in the Protestant Church in Austria. A feminist-analytical environment emerged with many creative women: the ARGE Evangelischer Theologinnen, the Österreichische Frauenforum feministische Theologie and its magazine "Der Apfel" and many more. Inge Schintlmeister set about linking these forces; Evi Krobath, Gerhilde Merz and Christiane Némét were at her side from the very beginning.

Founding

In 1988, the "Ecumenical Workshop: Women and the Church" from which the working group 'Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women in Austria' developed in 1989. The formal founding of the association did not take place until 2005. The Forum became a member of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Austria as early as 1990.



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1st Ecumenical Women's Meeting

In May 1992, the "1st Ecumenical Women's Meeting" took place with 115 participants in the Bildungshaus Lainz/Vienna. A resolution "Christian Women Demand More Voice" was passed and a documentary "My voice, your voice, our voice" was published.

Women's Tent at the UN Human Rights Conference 1993

When the UN Human Rights Conference took place in Vienna in 1993, there was an ecumenical service in St. Stephen's Cathedral at which only men were allowed to speak! Women were represented in large numbers in the women's tent and at the large rally at the "Fest statt Festung" on Danube Island (June 19-20, 1993). Hedi Gründler crafted a large snail to highlight the slow progress made in women's rights, politically and in churches. She was present with the snail on wheels both at Stephansplatz and at the festival grounds on Danube Island.

Women's Synod movement

The Ecumenical Women's Forum in Austria formed an important basis for the organization of the 1st Austrian Women's Synod in October 1992 "Women and Power" in the Bildungshaus Puchberg near Wels and then the 1st European Women's Synod in Gmunden in July 1996 "European Women on the Move" with over 1,000 participants. The Ecumenical Women's Forum provided the contacts and the network at European level without which the synods would not have been possible.

2nd European Ecumenical Assembly, Graz 1997



Protests at the 2nd Ecumenical Assembly, Photo credit: EFECW

During the 2nd Ecumenical Assembly in Graz, there was a women's center in the Heilandskirche on the initiative of Evi Krobath. There, reports on experiences of violence and the exclusion of women were the central themes. They developed a greater vision of a new society and a different form of ecumenism. Michaela Moser, press officer at the

Women's Center in Graz, emphasized in her closing statement: "Women are not a supporting program! As long as women do not achieve full equality in all churches, their credibility as the Church of God will continue to suffer."



Political night prayers for women

In the context of the Ecumenical Forum, a new worship format was created - based on Dorothee Sölle's "Political Night Prayer" in Cologne. Framed by creative liturgical parts, workshops and activities also took place in between.

Here is a list of the titles of the Night Prayers: "Resistance and uprising" (1995), "Wake up, Debora, wake up" (1996), "Stumbling blocks on the way to Graz: The demanding widow and the impatience of women" (1997), "...their eyes were opened" (1997), "You place my feet in a wide space" (1998), "Behind the veil the guilt" (1999), "Against resignation" (2000), "All women? All women!" (2004) and "Clearing the Slate – Anger and Courage in Times of Injustice and Overburden" (2006).

The political night prayers, in which I was also able to play a significant role, had a tremendous impact on the further development of women's liturgies in all churches.

Charter Oecumenica

The Charta Oecumenica was adopted in 2001 by the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC) as a joint commitment to cooperation among churches in Europe. The Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women in Europe was actively involved in the discussion and implementation of the Charter and advocated gender-equitable ecumenical cooperation, particularly in the following areas:

- Greater involvement of women in church decision-making processes
- More equitable distribution of leadership positions in the churches
- Involvement of women in peace and reconciliation initiatives, especially in conflict regions of Europe
- Gender-equitable social policy
- Intensified interreligious dialog, especially to strengthen women's rights
- Women's perspective on migration and protection of refugees
- Environmentally conscious, sustainable lifestyles from a Christian perspective

Neighbours in Central Europe. Encounters in 2003 and 2005

In the first years after the fall of the "Iron Curtain" in 1989, the aim was to improve the strained neighbourly relations with the Czech Republic. Together with colleagues from Bavaria, the Austrian women took part in a neighbourhood meeting in Ceské/Czech Republic on the topic of "Living as reconciled neighbours in Central Europe". In 2005, a joint borderland hike took place with the women from the Czech Republic - including ORF journalist Barbara Coudenhove-Kalergi with Czech roots. The starting point was Hojná Vodá, Caplice district.



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Austrian “Social Word of Women 2003”

The Social Word of Women saw itself as a contribution and supplement to the discussion process of the “Ecumenical Social Word of the Churches in Austria”, in which women appeared “only” as a cross-cutting theme. The Women's Social Word addressed the following topics:

- Education: Emphasizing the importance of education for women's equality and self-determination.
- Work: Discussion the double of paid work and care work on women and demanding fair pay.
- Social security: Analysing of the specific challenges women face in the social security system and in old age.
- Violence against women: Addressing domestic violence and structural discrimination.
- Peace and justice: Emphasizing the role of women in peace processes and in promoting social justice.
- Ecology: Linking environmental issues to women's lived reality and their commitment to sustainability.

The document aimed to make women's specific experiences and perspectives visible in social discourses and to contribute to a more just and inclusive society.

Five years after the Ecumenical Social Word of the Churches, a consultation was held in October 2008 under the title “Women's Social Word 08”. The ethical-feminist considerations focused on the following topics: How do women live on the margins of the formal labour market? What do cleaning women, nurses, beggars, etc., made up of a high percentage of migrants, need? And: How can women secure their livelihoods in old age? What legal and social prerequisites are needed for a good life for older women?



The Austrian Forum women at the 2018 Women's Reception to mark 100 years of women's suffrage. Photo-credit: Reinprecht

Women's Receptions

Starting in 2008, an Ecumenical Women's Reception was held annually, similar to the Austrian Ecumenical Council Reception. Pictured here are the Forum women at the 2018 Women's Reception to mark 100 years of women's suffrage. From 2008 onwards, an Ecumenical Women's Reception was held annually.



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EFECW NC Meeting in Vienna: “Let's rock the Economy” 2013

In September 2013, the national coordinators' meeting of the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women in Europe took place in Vienna, bringing together over 60 national coordinators from 26 European countries. Under the motto “Let's rock the Economy”, a central concern was to rethink the evaluation of economic factors and to promote alternative economic models that take social justice and ecological sustainability more into account.

Musical Women's Mass

In May 2018, a musical women's mass was held at the Evangelical Methodist Church in Vienna, as part of the “Long Night of Churches”. This ecumenical mass was conceived by Brigitte Enzner-Propst (Germany) and composed by Claudia Mitscha-Eibl (Austria). The focus of the service was the nameless woman from the Gospel of Mark who anointed Jesus. Participants also had the opportunity to be anointed during the service.

Open Letter to the Christian women in Ukraine 2022

On February 22, 2022 (two days before the outbreak of the war of Russia against Ukraine), the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women in Austria published an open letter to Christian women in Ukraine. In this letter, the national coordinators expressed our concern about the growing threat that Russia poses to Ukraine. We declared our solidarity with the people who could be caught between the fronts. We also offered to participate in de-escalation processes to the best of our ability and asked for specific areas where support could be provided.

European Project for Interreligious Learning / Reinhild Traitler Symposium



Photo-credit: Sarah Brunner

Founded by two “ecumenical women”, Reinhild Traitler, an Austrian, and Teny Pirri-Simonian, an Armenian living in Switzerland, the “European Project for Interreligious Learning” (EPIL) has been affiliated with the Ecumenical Forum since around 2005. For 18 years, I was privileged to accompany five Austrian learning groups on their travels. Ecumenical women were particularly invited to the public events during the Vienna modules, and together they reflected on the importance of interreligious dialogue for a changing Europe.

In October 2023, one year after the death of Reinhild Traitler, Gabi Kienesberger and I, as national coordinators, decided to organize a symposium on “Women in Dialogue for Peace” in Vienna as a joint project of EPIL and the



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Forum. Over 70 participants with Muslim and Christian backgrounds from across Europe attended. Lectures, workshops and an excursion to the Peace University at Schlaining Castle addressed the role of women in peace processes and how to deal with gender-based violence. The symposium honored Reinhild Traitler's commitment to empowering women and promoting interreligious exchange.



Photo-credit: Sarah Brunner

Closure of the Association



Barbara Heyse-Schaefer, Photo-credit: evang.at

For over a year, Gabi Kienesberger and I considered expanding the ecumenical forum into an interfaith platform. There was considerable interest, particularly among young Muslim women, in participating, but the Christian women had somehow “run out of steam”. The association was voluntarily closed, effective February 28, 2025. The reasons for this are manifold: the changing political situation in Europe, the dwindling

ecumenical interest, the standstill on women's issues within the churches ... The last remaining funds belonged to the Reinhild Traitler Fund dedicated to interreligious dialogue. In the future they will be administered by EFECW.

In future, all women interested in ecumenism will have the opportunity to become a member at European level as an individual woman. The newsletter of the European level can also be obtained on request: www.efecw.net

*By Pastor **Barbara Heyse-Schaefer**, former National Coordinator of the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women in Austria, frequent participant in EFECW General Assemblies and National Coordinators' Meetings.*

Translation from German: Agnes Kienesberger

Photo-credit: evang-wien.at





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Representation at the Council of Europe

Ecumenical Reunion, Strasbourg, January



From 25 to 27 January 2025, Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople was in Strasbourg to address the Council of Europe and visit various Christian communities. On Monday 27th January, the Patriarch of Constantinople was invited to address the Council of Europe for the opening of the Parliamentary Assembly. In front of the 306 MEPs representing the 46 member countries, Bartholomew I recalled that in Europe "we share common values that transcend national, political, religious, racial or cultural borders. This ethical awareness depends not

only on our religious convictions, but on the universal dignity of all human beings. And this is where the far-sighted and realistic perspective of religion can play a vital role," he added. The Green Patriarch also called for climate change to be taken into account in conflict resolution: "Our planet is affected by the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. Russia's unjustifiable war has inflicted damage on the country's ecosystems with an impact on the climate and the environment in this region and beyond." Bartholomew I underlined the beneficial use of artificial intelligence in this field, while valuing the "spirit of discernment" in its use. The Patriarch invites Christians to "continue the journey towards unity"

Before this intervention, His Holiness was invited by the Alsace-Moselle ecumenical commission, of which I am a member on behalf of the Forum, to meet with the Christian leaders of Alsace and Moselle at the Münsterhof, the parish hall of the cathedral of Strasbourg.

He called on Christians to draw on the Council of Nicaea to work for dialogue among Christians in a synodal way: "Ecumenism is not a distant dream. It is an urgent and necessary task," the Patriarch of Constantinople said. As Pope Francis announced at the Mass concluding the week of prayer for Christian unity, his desire to perpetuate the celebration of Easter on a common date, which is the case in 2025, Bartholomew I recalled the feasibility of the project, called for several years: "the Ecumenical Patriarchate, in dialogue with the sister Church of Rome, seeks the necessary conditions for an agreement on the formulation of a common date for the celebration of the Resurrection of Christ."





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“Eminences, Excellencies, dear fathers, beloved children in the Lord,

It is with great honour, but also with a deep sense of responsibility, that we meet here at the beginning of a year that is both a witness and a challenge for our Churches. This moment, suspended between heritage and future, is of the utmost importance, because divine providence has brought together two events of unprecedented historical significance: the 1700th anniversary of the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea and the joint celebration of Easter by the entire Christian world. It is here, in this ecumenical kairos, that we are invited to rethink our faith and our unity.

This jubilee and conciliar year, by its very essence, questions the notion of synodality, a concept which, for Orthodoxy, is not just a human organisation, but an expression of the mystery of Trinitarian communion. It is a living form, a force that structures and animates the life of the Church. At a time when the Roman Catholic Church is completing a conciliar reflection on this question, we feel it is essential to understand and grasp the ramifications of this synodality for today's ecumenical movement.

But let us begin with an introspective look. For the Orthodox Church, synodality is not simply an administrative structure. It is the visible manifestation of a mystery, that of the Trinity, inscribed in every gesture, every word, every collective decision that structures the Church. The ecumenical councils, and in particular the Council of Nicaea in 325, are a living model of this: they were able to unify the nascent Church under the Roman Empire, and more than that, they laid the foundations for dialogue between the local Churches. This dialogue, far from over, continues to nourish and inspire our reflections, as we saw at the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church in Crete in 2016.

The Council of Nicaea, with its 318 bishops united in a single impulse, did not seek to impose a petrified truth, but to trace the path towards a living, dynamic unity that is always in the making. The dogma of Nicaea, expressed in its Creed, symbolises this ceaseless quest: unity in diversity, with Christ as the principle of reconciliation. It is this Creed, affirming the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, that opens us to a deeper understanding of the Trinitarian mystery. But this Creed, like the faith itself, lives only in the Eucharistic context of the Church. It is a prayer as much as a theological affirmation.

For us, the faith of Nicaea is not a dogma frozen in time; it is alive, illuminating our path, calling us. Like a hearth that spreads light and warmth, this Jubilee invites us to return to this original source, to this living and life-giving expression of faith. It urges us to re-examine the foundations of our communion and to update synodality as a principle of renewal and reconciliation. In this way, the legacy of Nicaea is more than a simple historical witness: it is an invitation to incarnate this unity, to translate it into our fragmented world.



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But Nicaea is also a question of concrete practices. Christian unity depends on simple gestures and practical decisions: the date of Easter, for example, remains a crucial issue for the visible unity of Christians. This issue, which has persisted for centuries, is much more than a mere liturgical detail: it reflects the deep divisions that still run through the Church. It is a silent cry, a bitter reminder of the division that separates Christians. For this reason, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, in dialogue with the Sister Church of Rome, is seeking the necessary conditions for agreement on the formulation of a common date for the celebration of the Resurrection of Christ. This approach, supported by His Holiness Pope Francis, is in keeping with the spirit of Nicaea. It is a desire to overcome our divisions, to finally fulfil Christ's call to unity: 'that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, so that they too may be one in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me'. (Jn 17, 21)

Setting a common date would not simply be a practical act, but a symbolic act of reconciliation, a living prophecy. It would remind us that, despite our differences, we can, by God's grace, overcome our divisions and proclaim together the victory of Christ, the conqueror of death. In a fractured world, this gesture would be a sign of Christian hope: unity is possible, because it is founded on the truth of Christ.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

It is with deep respect that we remember Nicaea, not only as a historic Council, but also as a model of synodality that continues to nourish the Church today. It is in this spirit that we celebrate this Jubilee, not as a simple tribute to the past, but as an invitation to action. Ecumenism is not a distant dream: it is an urgent and necessary task, a call to incarnate the Council's vision of unity and synodality, to put it into practice in our lives.

This Jubilee gives us a unique opportunity to go beyond mere commemoration: we are invited to relive, update and embody the legacy of Nicaea. By working together, overcoming our differences, we can work towards the unity of the Body of Christ, bringing about a new world in which the Christian faith will shine forth in its full force.

May this Jubilee be, for each of us, both a reflection on our heritage and an act of faith, a gesture of reconciliation, a common journey towards unity in Christ. May the Holy Spirit guide this journey, so that the Church continues to be the witness of the Risen Christ in the world."

The day ended with an ecumenical celebration in the Cathedral.



Photos and text, Anne Marie Schott, EFECW Representative to the Council of Europe



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NEWS FROM INTERNATIONAL & ECUMENICAL PARTNERS

Speaking through art, Ukrainian women confront sexual violence in conflict

On the occasion of the **International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict (19 June)**, UN Women spoke to two Ukrainian women artists about their experience and art as an expression of their resilience. Daria Zymenko is part of the NGO “SEMA Ukraine,” which brings together women who have survived sexual violence during captivity or occupation. Oleksandra Zborovska is a Ukrainian photographer and member of Ukrainian Women Photographers Organization, who works with Zymenko in creative art projects that explore deeply personal and socially relevant topics, including sexual violence in conflict. Read full article [here](#).

Shedding light on conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine

In 2023, the [United Nations reported 3,688 cases of conflict-related sexual violence globally](#)—a staggering 50 per cent increase from the previous year.

Between February 2022 - December 2024, [the United Nations in Ukraine has documented 433 cases of conflict-related sexual violence](#), perpetrated against 302 men, 119 women, 10 girls and 2 boys, including rape, mutilation or violence to genitals, forced nudity, threats and attempted rape. The real numbers are likely to be much higher, as many cases go unreported due to stigma, fear, and ongoing insecurity.

Resistance and healing through art

Together, the two women have recently participated in the “Serendipitous Events” art project, which brought together ten women innovators and ten artists to explore global challenges through creative artistic expressions. The project was organized by the NGO “Port of Culture” in partnership with UN Women, UNFPA, and Ukrainian House, a central hub for business, culture and socio-political life in Ukraine.

This story was prepared as part of the UN inter-agency project, “United Action to Empower Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence”, with the support of the UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict Network, implemented by UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Health Organization (WHO), UN Women and International Organization for Migration (IOM), in cooperation with the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy (beneficiary of international technical assistance) and the Office of the Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration.





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Announcements

Vigil of Peace

Join in prayer

The England Forum has its last meeting before a summer break on **Thursday 3 July**, which will start at **8pm CET**.

In view of the very unpeaceful times that we are in, our gathering will be a **Vigil for Peace**.

We are inviting all women to join us - there is a welcome for all. Please share this invitation.

If you have a smart-phone, and are confident about using a QR code, please bring it with you as we will be using this to input to a prayer word cloud.

A link to join the online meeting was shared via email to National Coordinators.

Please support:

The **Ruth-Epting Fund** (www.efecw.net) - which is essential for supporting financially the participation of women in EFECW events!

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

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