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

NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2026

Welcome to the Winter 2026 Newsletter of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women (EFECW)!

It can be said that renewal is not a single moment but a movement! In this edition of the EFECW Newsletter, renewal is a shared thread running through our reflections, projects, encounters and commitments across Europe and beyond.

As we look ahead to the 2026 General Assembly and Conference, the theme of renewal invites us to learn from our journeys, our many stories, shaped by joy and pain, faith and doubt, belonging and exclusion. It is by sharing these stories that we are changed, challenged and re-oriented. A special place for us to do this is within the EFECW. Whether through theological reflection, environmental activism, interreligious dialogue or questions of identity, renewal asks us who we are becoming together.

This newsletter bears witness to renewal in action: in the G.A.R.D.E.N. project's creative response to climate change; in courageous conversations about what it means to be a woman today; in the hope-filled yet honest reflections on failure, perseverance and faith; and in the ongoing work of reconciliation, justice and peace carried by our national forums, young women, and international representatives.*

At such a time of global danger and uncertainty, and as we remember our sisters in Ukraine and in other places of conflict, the Forum's commitment to peace, reconciliation and hope is essential. We may at times feel powerless, yet as women together we can look to renewal, to the stories of hope and courage shared in this newsletter, and support one another to continue to strive for justice, peace and reconciliation, trusting that God walks with us even in uncertainty and calls us, again and again, to be signs of hope in the world.

Anthea Sully, EFECW CC member – Photo: EFECW

COORDINATING COMMITTEE

INVITATION

XII General Assembly & Conference

from 8-13 September 2026

Begegnungszentrum Sonneck, in Marburg, Germany

Renewal: "Then their eyes were opened…" *Luk: 24:31*

RENEWAL in many forms and under different considerations is the thematic focus of the GA & Conference in 2026.

'A human being is a story.' We live in and from a constant flow of other people's lives and experiences. In the encounter with another person's life's situation, something resonates with our own way of living, being, and acting in the world. Here, the individual's story and experiences are intertwined with the relationships and diverse communities of the wider context. Joy, longing, anguish, need, and pain go hand in hand. We are surprised and affected. We engage in self-criticism and allow ourselves to be guided by partly new questions. We re-discover and learn new things along the way.

G.A.R.D.E.N. (Gathering Around Religion, Dance, Energy, Nature) - An environmental project fosters not only our new ways of traveling and coming together but also allows for the participants through interdisciplinary approaches that include drama to develop long-term strategies and activism of how we engage with climate change as a Forum.

Who is a **WOMAN*** today?

Another important discussion under the umbrella of renewal focuses on the emerging question of who a woman is and who is allowed to identify as a woman: As gender plays a significant role in the Forum's identity, it is crucial to reflect and discuss the forum's adjustment to complex, fluid identities and diverse life realities of women* today.

"Reinhild Traitler Fund" for Interreligious dialogue

Description and criteria

Photo: Nata Hovorkova

Dr. Reinhild Traitler-Espiritu (1940-2022) campaigned for a better and fairer world in the church and society and particularly encouraged women to follow their own path. The philologist and feminist theologian was one of the founders of the European Project for Interreligious Learning (EPIL).

Based on the remaining financial holdings of the European Project for Interreligious Learning (EPIL), the Reinhild Traitler fund was endowed with € 14,865.

The money was handed over by EPIL to the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women in Europe. A small allocation committee was set up by the last EPIL board.

Funding will be open to projects of interreligious learning and peace building in general and for projects by former EPIL participants as a continuation of this work.

Projects should focus on women's demands and perspectives - but of course, when important to the issue, men should be involved too. An international perspective is also important for projects at local level.

Projects must align with the following EPIL aims:

a) Interreligious spirituality and interculture learning

b) Women's rights and Gender mainstreaming

c) Living together, neighbourhood meetings and sharing expertise

d) Capacity building, leadership development and young women empowerment

e) Peace, justice, reconciliation and healing

The maximum amount granted is € 5,000.

If you want to learn more and/or download application form visit EFECW website.

The pilgrimage of hope[1]

Hope is our "path" in a society and political world that is discouraged, inhabited by fear, prey to discourses and attitudes of hatred that generate conflicts at every level and give rise to resentment and malice. It is an expectation rooted in the human heart.

"Not only that; let us exult, too, in our hardships, understanding that hardship develops perseverance, and perseverance develops a tested character, something that gives us hope." (Rom 5:3–4)

Wherever we are, we are signs of the world's salvation. "Hope is contained in the heart of every person as a desire and expectation of the good, even without knowing what tomorrow will bring."

The world is saved and we are its witnesses; we must "not fall into the temptation of thinking ourselves overwhelmed by evil and violence." We are called to be signs of hope in a world marked by the failure caused by exclusion and indifference. If aspiration is the time of project, hope fights against what crushes us, against the terrible things from which we long to be delivered.

We also undoubtedly pay the price for this from time to time. This is failure. It is part of our lives, and the path of hope looks it squarely in the face, waiting for joy and thus initiating recovery, that time when the light rises after many trials that reveal our capacity for perseverance.

We too, no doubt, suffer from this at times. This is failure. It is part of our lives, and the path of hope looks it squarely in the face; it awaits joy and initiates renewal—the moment when light rises again after long trials, revealing our capacity for perseverance.

Failure

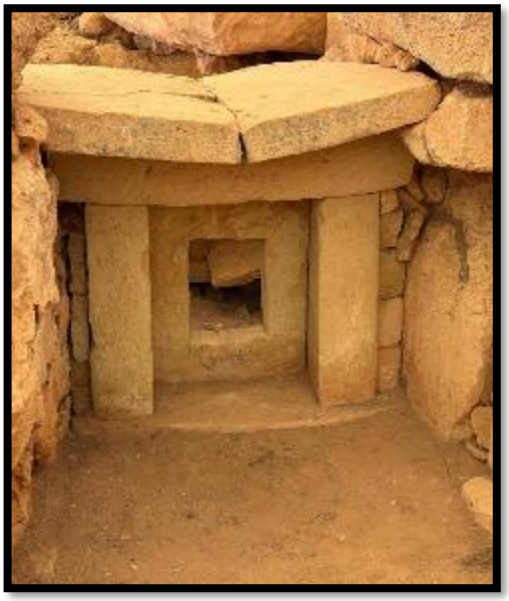
The fact that we can succeed only with the help of another is precisely why there is not merely success but salvation - and salvation rooted in Redemption itself: Christ saves the human race. This is the meaning of our pilgrimage of hope, founded on the certainty that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Do we truly believe this? We must be firmly anchored in this conviction if we are not to sink in the storm. Through the Incarnation, God himself has bound himself to humanity and to the world. Yet even so, we fall at times, and this can even be a grace—an opportunity to experience that evil and violence will not have the last word.

Failure is frowned upon

Social developments may lead us to believe that failure overwhelms us, and moreover, falling is no longer acceptable. Our values are trampled on and people may tell us: "There you are, you see - you're wrong, you're outdated. Face reality."

[1] *Extracts from the reflection offered by Bernard Senelle (Dominican priest) during the meeting of Christian associations at the Council of Europe, 12 October 2025*

Let me recall the experience of Pastor Roland de Pury, a member of the Resistance during the Second World War. Arrested by the Gestapo and then released, he once said:



"The Church is the world's underground; it is not a matter of seizing power but of organising the resistance while awaiting the landing of the Kingdom."

This sets the tone for the disciple of Christ acting within civil society. We have this particular task of preparing the landing of the Kingdom, of acting for the common good. Modern popes have chosen to address all men and women of good will, not only clergy and Catholic faithful. This tradition, inaugurated by John XXIII with Pacem in Terris (11 April 1963), was inscribed in the pastoral constitution Gaudium et Spes. Pope Francis appeals to the conscience of each person to honour human dignity; he calls for communion and justice.

It is difficult, for in our world one must succeed at all costs, and always move forward. Yet the Gospel is a religion in which one falls. Falling is not part of the religious climate of moral or interior progress, where virtue, perseverance, asceticism and endurance are valued, often without acknowledging the right to fail or fall.

"Be all the more eager to confirm your calling and election, for if you do this, you will never stumble." (2 Pet 1:10) The weak one, the sinner, is the one who falls.

In the parable of the prodigal son, we tend to sympathise with the younger son who undergoes conversion and returns to the right path. But we have far less sympathy for the elder son, who has always acted well, always walked straight, and suddenly breaks down - falls.

Yet the Gospel of Jesus Christ is indeed a religion in which we fall. One may fall into temptation, for example, temptation towards evil and violence. But whatever the case, tax collectors and prostitutes go before us into the Kingdom.

"Today you will be with me in Paradise," Jesus tells the thief on the cross.

The very notion of original sin should prevent the pride of the Pharisee who boasts that he is not like others—a fallen one, a sinner. For a sinner who had not fallen, there would have been no reason for God to come down from heaven and become like us. God has troubled himself for us; he has placed himself on our path of hope—for life.

Our falls can be for greater life

All this is for greater life, so that light may triumph over every darkness.

Christ did not seek death, but he faced it by doing what he did and saying what he said. He suffered in confronting death; perhaps he even felt fear. Yet he accepted -out of obedience and faith, but above all out of love for his Father and for us- to suffer on the Cross so that we might have life. Christ accepts to fall like a fruit from the tree so that we may live.

We believe that death is only a passage. How much more, then, our falls and sins! What matters is not to settle into them. What matters is to pass through them. Pass into life, rise again! We must constantly pass from falling to rising.

On the ground, we must be ready for God's visit, which always comes when we least expect it, like a thief in the night, when our eyes and heart are soiled by the mud of the road.

At the heart of our falls: watch, wait, hope.

Blessed is the servant found keeping vigil. One can keep one's lamp alight and still fall. And perhaps it is precisely in the depths of night that the lamp must remain lit, so that the Lord may find us. Perhaps it is at our lowest point that we most need the strength of waiting, of hope, of trust. Like a lighthouse on the sea at night.

Reactions to failure: optimism and discouragement

"Everyone hopes. Hope is contained in the heart of every person as a desire and expectation of the good, even without knowing what tomorrow will bring. The unpredictability of the future gives rise to feelings that are sometimes contradictory: from trust to fear, from serenity to discouragement, from certainty to doubt." Thus, in the face of failure, we may react in various ways.

Optimism

Hope is not a matter of temperament. One may flee into imagination or into easy optimism: "It won't happen to me; it will all work out; let's have a drink and forget it."

But escape into forgetfulness is the worst failure. Reality is encountered by confronting what resists us. There is a connection between a sense of reality and the experience of failure. And we cannot always overcome every failure.

Discouragement

"We often meet discouraged people who look to the future with scepticism and pessimism, as though nothing could bring them happiness."

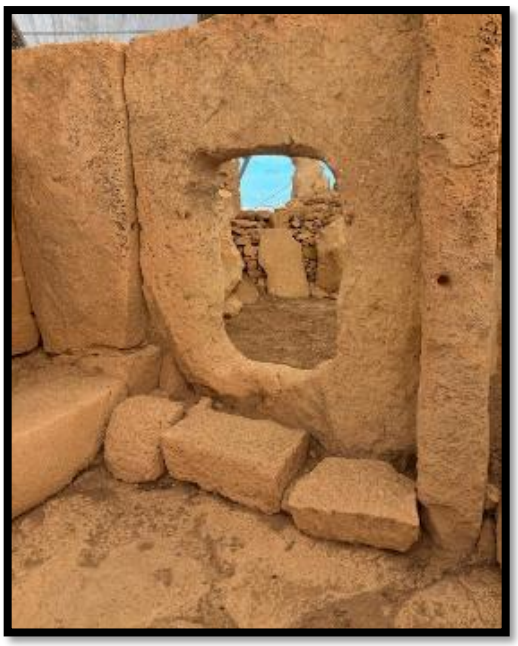
Facing failure, one may sink into discouragement - doubting oneself, then losing heart, then falling into despair. Failure becomes a dimension of being.

We may blame circumstances or others while secretly blaming ourselves. We give up.

What is serious is not failure but fleeing from failure, like candidates who do not sit an exam for fear of failing, and thus place themselves in the very situation they fear.

When escapism and discouragement are avoided, the right response is to begin again, to rise, and to reach success. It is by victory over the obstacle that we grow.

We grow more inclined to give up because the world does not prepare us to face the drama of human life. Technical progress creates the illusion that what is instantaneous in technology can be instantaneous in human life. When results are not immediate, we are lost. Combativeness must not be confused with sheer will-power.



Rising Again: Hope and Perseverance

What matters is to fight. "Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." (Rom 5:3–4)

Hope

Hope transfigures all attitudes. It gives meaning not only to success but even to escapism and despair. It is given to us as a beacon.

Already in Genesis (3:8–13): "Adam, where are you? And you, Eve? Why are you afraid? Why do you hide? Look: I come not to judge you, but to seek you."

Where are you today? Where has your freedom led you? This freedom—God has willed it and wills it still. He comes to set our freedom free so that it may lead us to the Garden of Life.

He does not impose himself; he walks beside us, humbly and silently. If we wander, he goes with us.

In the New Testament, hope dares to say: nothing can separate us from the love of the Lord.

It is not vague optimism, nor the idea that "things will sort themselves out." Hope looks disaster in the face—even what may be irreversible. It dwells at the heart of despair and believes that evil has been overcome.

This is the hope that turns our falls into blessed faults, rooted in faith in the Resurrection—when life springs from the tomb.

Perseverance

Perseverance is patience, a virtue closely linked to hope.

Saint Paul appeals to patience, affirming that God is patient with us—"the God of perseverance and encouragement." (Rom 15:5)

Begin by fighting

Hope is the result, not the starting point: fight first, and hope will come. "All those whom I love, I reprove and discipline." (Rev 3:19)

God prunes us to make us fruitful: "Every branch that bears fruit my Father prunes so that it may bear more fruit." (John 15:2)

We may cry: "What more does he want?" He wants everything.

We must enter the time of patience and purification.

Until the day breaks

God believes that no life is lost and that no fall is the last word. His final word is always a word of life. And so we must live through the night until the dawn. Dawn comes when Bartimaeus cries out: "Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me!"

Jesus stops, calls him, lifts him up, restores his sight: "What do you want me to do for you?"

The crowd may expect nothing from Jesus. Bartimaeus knows exactly what he hopes for: "Master, let me see again!" Let me rise from where I have fallen. Paul fell on the road to Damascus.

One cannot speak of grace or mercy without knowing what it is to fall and to be raised up. From Genesis onwards, evil and sin abound: disobedience, murder, wickedness, pride. Everything seems to collapse. Yet even before humanity acts, chaos is already present and God sees that it is good.

Not all will enter the flock; entire towns will refuse him. And Jesus is amazed at their lack of faith. (Mark 6:1–6)

One may see life as a path of perfection on which one eventually falls. Or as a path made of falls, from which we must allow ourselves to be raised—again and again—by the grace of God.

Translation and summary Anne Marie Schott, National Coordinator French Forum

Photos: Ħaġar Qim and Mnajdra – Malta megalithic sites, Maria Koutatzi

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL EFECW

England Forum

England National Coordinator and Sixty Years of Faith, Friendship and Reconciliation

2025 marked 85 years since the bombing of Coventry and 80 years since the bombing of Dresden. For Dorothy Knights, England national coordinator, these anniversaries represent part of her own lived experience of reconciliation.

The morning after the bombing of Coventry the Provost of the cathedral took three medieval nails from the ruins and formed them into a cross, writing the words "Father forgive" on the cathedral wall. The Cross of Nails became a symbol of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation, giving rise to an international community committed to healing the wounds of conflict.

Dorothy went to Germany in the mid-1960s, spending two gap years in West Berlin learning German. In 1965, she joined Coventry Cathedral's summer work camp in Dresden, then in the German Democratic Republic. Four fifths of the Deaconess Hospital had been destroyed in the bombing, and the community had waited twenty years for rebuilding to begin.

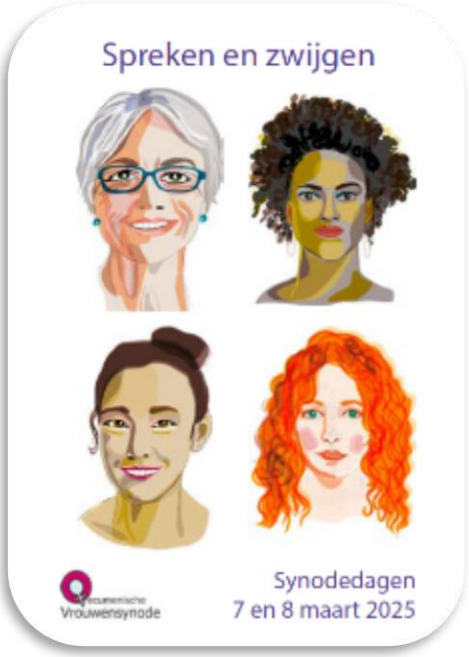
Working alongside young East German Christians, Dorothy and others from Coventry cleared rubble and prepared the site for renewal. The project, funded by the people of Coventry, expressed commitment to reconciliation embodied in the Cross of Nails.

Last September, Dorothy returned to Dresden to mark sixty years since the first Cross of Nails arrived. She was joined by Kate Massey, Canon for Arts and Reconciliation at Coventry Cathedral, and representatives from both countries. One friendship that began in 1965, between Dorothy and Brigitte Eimert, endured throughout the Cold War and Dorothy and Brigitte were delighted to meet again at the reunion. During a service of thanksgiving, Dorothy spoke in German of reconciliation as a continuing Christian calling.

Photos: Dorothy Knights, Text: Anthea Sully, EFECW CC member

Dutch Women's Synod

Ecumenical Women's Synod Days



For the eighth time, a Women's Synod was held for two days (7-8 March 2025) in the hospitable Dominican monastery in Huissen.

It is always a pleasure to greet old acquaintances, speak with new women, and gain inspiration from the lectures and workshops. The program was diverse. A total of 41 women chose to participate in the entire program, while 29 women opted to attend for just one day.

On both March 7 and 8, the synod day began with a celebration, followed by a plenary lecture. Cynthia Haaswijk spoke on March 7 about 'Woman, speak/preach!'. On March 8, Mariecke van den Berg reflected on 'Blasphemy as a Mirror of the Broken God'. More about both lectures can be found in the quarterly journal ZijSpiegel (meaning Side Mirror, in picture below), including various workshop reports of the Synod.

We felt connected to those who celebrated World Day of Prayer, those who participated in the Feminist March in Amsterdam, and those who were anxiously awaiting of what the synod of the Dutch Christian Reformed Churches would decide about the participation of LGBTQ+ individuals.

These synod days have been made possible by the grant - among others - which we received from the Reinhild Traitler Fund, for which we would like to sincerely thank you. It still proves to be very empowering and an important support for women when they can share their experiences gained in the churches with each other.

On behalf of the board of

the Ecumenical Women's Synod

Rebecca Onderstal, chair and

Dullyna van der Weit, treasurer

Czech Ecumenical Women's Forum

Autumn meeting

Main program

Creative training of memory. Alena Naimanová, who leads special courses of practical classes focused on training memory got us acquainted with different methods of remembering. Concentration is essential to achieve good results. It is necessary to remember individual segments that are apparently not interconnected. By getting older, the number of cells is getting lower, but new cells appear. Interconnection of both brain hemispheres help. How to improve concentration? For better remembering it is necessary to interconnect listening, movement and thought. We received practical exercises for trying and seeing how it works.

Invitations

- Exhibition of Marlis Schulte (Germany), in Nová síň (New Hall), Voršilská St. works of art created using special technology, metal, oxidation.

- Proposal to exhibit embroidered pictures made by Slovak women from the Reformed Church (scenes from Bible and Slovak history). The sisters offer exhibiting the pictures in Prague. We must consider when, where and how. Proposed by Olga Stránská. She has a brochure (catalogue) of all possible exhibits.

17th November -World´s Prayers Day and our regular meeting of Forum

12th December - traditional Advent worship and gathering – Preparation Alena Naimanová (Hussite Church)

Plan for 2026

15th April (Wednesday after Easter) – annual meeting, our friend Daniela Horinková from Slovakia visiting

17th June – "Armchair for our guest"– Naděje Mandysová recalling 30 years of work of EFKŽ ČR

16th September - Alena Naimanová – 55 years of her ministry

17th November World´s Prayers Day

December: Advent Worship – prepared by RC Church.

Text and Photos: Mira Poloprutska, National Coordinator

OPEN SPACE DISCUSSIONS

"Supporting Someone Through Trauma"

26 October 2025

The EFECW Open Space discussion about "Supporting Someone Through Trauma" on Sunday 26th October 2025, created a safe and supportive environment for our group of young women to talk about how we can help others and each other during tough times.

The session was all about being open and respectful while keeping things private and making sure everyone felt comfortable.

Slide of PPT created by Hannah Wehner

We talked about how our everyday conversations can be a big help to someone going through a hard time, just by being kind, thoughtful, and willing to listen. We also learned how to respond if someone tells us something really awful, and got some tips on how to be there for them and point them towards professional help if they need it.

And we didn't forget about taking care of ourselves either - we talked about how important it is to look after *ourselves* too when we're helping others. It was a really nice time where we all learned from each other and supported each other, showing us that even small gestures can make a big difference.

Mirella Sava

Helpful resources: https://www.we-consent.ie/resource-hub/resources/advice-for-those-supporting-others/

"Queerness, Love and Freedom"

16 November 2025

On Sunday, November 16th 2025, the young women of the forum held another Open Space discussion. This time dedicated to the topic of Queerness.

We began by sharing our favourite Advent activities, talking about different pride flags and reflecting on inspiring quotes. Afterwards, we looked at the PowerPoint presentation of the LGBT*IQ Network Mittelhessen, which had held a workshop for the CC during their meeting in Marburg in August 2025.

Some of the topics included in this workshop were:

Sexual orientation and gender diversity – what's behind them? What's the deal with gender, queerness, and the abbreviation LGBTQIA?*

As we shared our thoughts with one another, it quickly became clear that communication is the most important aspect when talking about queerness. Queerness can evoke a wide range of emotions in us: vibrant joy, gentle curiosity, uncertainty, courage, and sometimes old wounds. Many of us have learned—often unconsciously, that our identities should not take up too much space. We have heard phrases like "don't be so obvious," "try to be normal," or "it's just a phase." And yet, we carry a deep longing to be seen, understood, and to live a life rooted in authentic freedom. Being able to talk freely about queerness means

– exploring ourselves,

– shaping relationships,

– setting boundaries,

– creating freedom,

– and finding community.

It means having language for who we are while remaining open to change. Identity is never fixed; it grows, evolves, and can be reshaped at any time.

Beyond personal stories, we also discussed frameworks we would like to implement at the GA.

So, let's continue to question stereotypes and limiting belief systems, and let's celebrate our diversity. It is essential to create spaces in which everyone is welcome.

Agnes Kienesberger

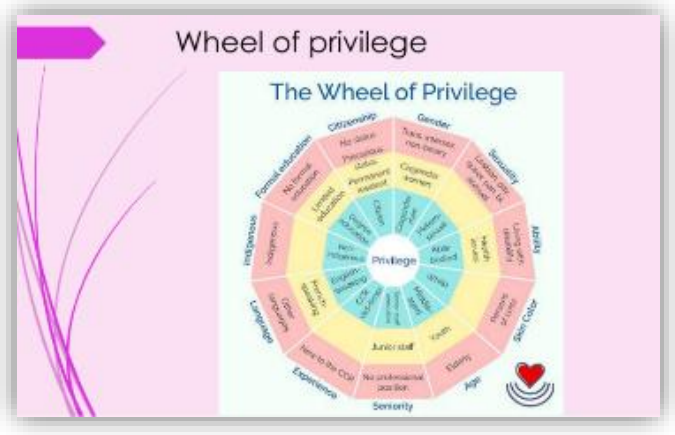
Photo 1: Queeres Zentrum Marburg, Photo 2: AOL LGBTQ quotes

"Privilege"

21 December 2025

In the December session of the Open Space Discussion for Young Women, the theme of Privilege was explored in a thoughtful and engaging way. The session was facilitated by Hannah and Jelena and offered a meaningful opportunity for reflection, dialogue, and mutual learning within a safe and supportive community space.

From the very beginning, we emphasized the importance of trust and respect. Together, we reaffirmed a group communication contract, encouraging mindful speaking and listening, confidentiality, and equal participation. This shared agreement helped create an atmosphere in which everyone felt welcome to contribute openly.



Screenshot of PPT prepared by Hannah Wehner

The session was thoughtfully structured and rich in content. We opened and closed our time together with Words of Kindness, setting a warm and affirming tone throughout the discussion. Participants were then introduced to the concept of privilege through guided reflection and the Wheel of Privilege activity. This exercise helped visualize the many dimensions of privilege and invited participants to reflect on their own lived experiences.

A central part of the session was the open discussion, where participants shared personal insights and explored how privilege shows up in everyday life, particularly in the context of the Christmas season. These conversations were marked by honesty, empathy, and a deep respect for diverse perspectives.

To deepen our understanding, we also shared selected resources, including the videos What is Privilege?What is Allyship? and Allyship in Practice. These materials sparked further reflection and encouraged participants to think about concrete ways of practicing allyship in their own contexts.

Overall, the session highlighted the importance of recognizing privilege, cultivating allyship, and strengthening trust within our community. Many participants expressed gratitude for the open, safe space and for the balance between listening, sharing, giving, and receiving.

We would like to thank everyone who joined us for their presence, openness, and valuable contributions this year. We look forward to continuing this journey together in our upcoming sessions.

Jelena G. Mladenović, EFECW CC member

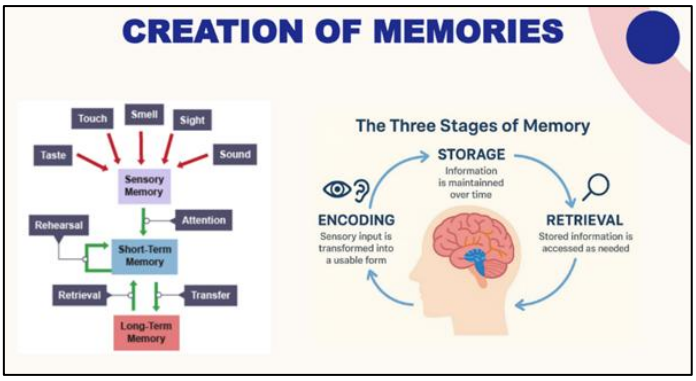
"Memory"

18 January 2025

In the gentle rhythm of January, we gathered once again for our monthly Open Space Discussion for Young Women to reflect together on the theme of Memory.

January felt like a particularly fitting moment for this conversation. As the first month of the year, it naturally invites reflection on the year behind us while opening space for hopes, intentions, and expectations for the year ahead. This made the discussion especially enriching and timely.

We began by talking about New Year's resolutions, with participants openly sharing their thoughts and experiences around setting intentions and navigating expectations. From there, the conversation gently moved into reflections on memory, introduced through several inspiring quotes. One that resonated deeply with the group was: "Memory is the diary that we all carry about with us."



Slide from PPT created by Hannah

As the discussion unfolded, we explored the process of memory creation and reflected on the three key phases of memory: encoding, storage, and retrieval. This led us to consider how memories shape our decisions and influence the way we see ourselves and the world around us. A particularly powerful insight emerged: while memories shape us, we also have the ability to be conscious creators of our own memories by making our present reality more meaningful.

Participants then shared personal ways of preserving memories — through diaries and journals, photography, journalism, letters, souvenirs, social media, videos, and other creative forms. It was deeply inspiring to hear how memories are kept alive and remain profoundly woven into our hearts through such diverse and intimate practices.

As always, the session concluded with a rich and fruitful open discussion. The exchange was filled with thoughtful comments, additions, personal stories, and a warm, positive energy — the very essence of our online gatherings and carefully chosen themes.

We closed the evening with a shared sense of connection and gratitude, reminded that memories are not only something we look back on, but something we consciously create together, moment by moment.

With this spirit, we carry the reflections of this Open Space into the year ahead — attentive, intentional, and open to the memories yet to come.

Jelena G. Mladenović, EFECW CC member

EFECW REPRESENTATION

Conference of International NGOs (CINGO)

Council of Europe, Autumn Session, 13-16 October 2025, Strasbourg

The Conference of International NGOs (CINGO) held its Autumn Session on 13-16 October with a special item on civic space and problematic developments in several Council of Europe member states related to foreign agent legislations, administrative burdens, situations of abusive proceedings, harassment and retaliatory action affecting civil society organisations and and their members who defend human rights, even for their participation in Council of Europe activities.

Exchanges of views were held with Ambassador Caitriona Doyle (Chair of the Rapporteur Group on Democracy) and Ambassador Vebjørn Heines (Vice-Chair of the Steering Committee on Democracy), notably on the New Democratic Pact, on the legal status of NGOs in Europe and the finalisation of the Parameters to support the implementation of the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy.

On behalf of the FORUM, I have signed these recommendations, which are building blocks for a more egalitarian and fraternal world (CINGO also adopted the following texts addressed to the Council of Europe and the member States):

- Statement on "The human cost of war: a call for peace and protection in Gaza";
- Recommendation "For a permanent Platform for Ongoing Interreligious and Inter-convictional Dialogue within the Council of Europe";
- Recommendation on "State Accountability in the Provision of Housing for People on the Move, Refugees and Asylum Seekers – A fundamental matter of respect of human rights";
- Recommendation on "Access to sport for all as a recognised fundamental right".

CINGO also discussed reports on ongoing work relating to thematic commissions, the youth strategy – a strategy that is crucial for the future – and the Expert Council on NGO Law, which includes the preparation of a new study on recent national developments that compromise or could compromise the ability of NGOs to operate.

This session was marked by three days of respectful and fruitful exchanges and enriching encounters.

Our Ecumenical Forum is recognised and its voice, conveyed through various interventions, is listened to and taken into account.

Anne-Marie Schott, EFECW representative to CINGO

Conference of International NGOs (CINGO)

International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

The observance of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty can be traced back to 17 October 1987. On that day, over a hundred thousand people gathered at the Trocadéro in Paris, where the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed in 1948, to honour the victims of extreme poverty, violence and hunger. They proclaimed that poverty is a violation of human rights and affirmed the need to come together to ensure that these rights are respected. Since then, people of all backgrounds, beliefs and social origins have gathered every year on October 17th to renew their commitment and show their solidarity with the poor.

This year again, this Day of 15 October 2025 was held on the forecourt of the Palais de l'Europe, in front of the commemorative slab symbolizing the rejection of extreme poverty. The ceremony, opened by Gerhard Ermischer, President of the Conference of INGOs (COING) brought together representatives of the Council of Europe, international organisations, members of COING, as well as people sharing their testimony on situations of poverty. All reaffirmed their commitment to social justice – including access to health – and respect for human dignity.

We were not many, but *on behalf of EFECW*, as a Christian, I felt it was right to be there. *The Gospel urges us to put the most vulnerable at the heart of our concerns and to recognise the poor not as objects of charity, but as essential agents of hope.*

Among the speakers, Olivier De Schutter, member of the European Committee of Social Rights, UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, said: *"Recognizing people living in poverty as rights holders is a responsible approach that mitigates stigmatization and ensures that political solutions build on their lived experiences.*»

In his concluding remarks, Bjørn Berge, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, reiterated this essential point that *"Poverty is not a personal failure, but a systemic failure, a denial of dignity and human rights."*

Text and Photo: Anne-Marie Schott, National Coordinator French EFECW

Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE)

48th General Meeting, 9-12 October 2025, Vienna

In October, the EFECW was invited to take part in the EYCE 48th general meeting in Vienna, from October 9th to 12th 2025. The Ecumenical Youth Council of Europe (EYCE) is an organisation that aims to spread more awareness of Christian churches across Europe. The general meeting is held every four years where the members - among other organisational topics - appoint their new Executive Committee (ExCo) and review the last term. Countries and denominations from all over Europe took part.

The general meeting was organized to include time in smaller working groups: programme, finances and fundraising, and nominations. They all worked on their own agenda and would present their findings to the entire meeting afterwards.

On Friday afternoon we first joined the reports from member organizations. They each introduced themselves and gave an overview of their yearly programme – youth camps, bible studies or political engagement. We were also invited to give a short introduction about EFECW and looked back to our joined study session in Budapest in September. After that, we were able to listen to the programme committee work and even contribute our own ideas.

On Saturday morning, the results of the programme and nominations committee were presented. Former included new plans for reviews of past activities and ecumenical work with children, while the latter talked about how the ExCo should be made up in terms of balance and experience. They also reported on how they interviewed each candidate. After a lunch break we made our way to the St. Salvator church in the 1st district. Here, the EYCE members were invited to take part in an old-catholic service held in honour of the ordination of Jutta Schmitzberger. She is part of the board of the Ecumenical Youth Council in Austria.

To me the general meeting was exactly what the EYCE stands for – ecumenical education. As a young roman-catholic who didn't know a lot about ecumenical Christianity, I was their prime target group. I can confidently say I learned a lot that weekend and I am grateful to have gotten that opportunity! Thank you to the EYCE for inviting us!

Text and photos: Luisa Obermüller

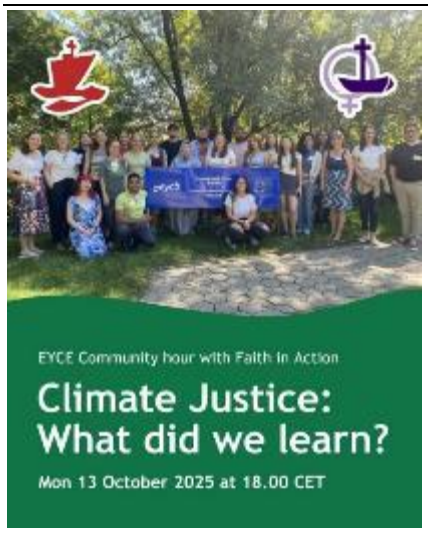
World Forum for Democracy

"Democracy at risk: how we can revive it?"

I had the great opportunity to participate as a member of the youth delegation in the 2025 edition of the World Forum for Democracy that took place 5-7 November in the Council of Europe building in Strasbourg. Ahead of the event itself, we enjoyed two preparatory days that helped us to get ready. I was able to enjoy interesting days filled with enriching discussions about democracy, its current global state, ideas and solutions to the challenges of our times, and a lot of additional input. I left Strasbourg revived, inspired, and full of new energy.

Group picture of the youth delegation, on the last day, at the Council of Europe

Photos: Council of Europe *Text: Hannah Wehner, EFECW CC member*



EYCE Community Hour

On Monday, 13 October 2025 participants of EFECW joined EYCE's Community Hour that was held to our joined Study Session 'Faith in Action' and offered an opportunity to reflect, to think about the learnings, and to elaborate future project and activism opportunities.

The collaboration with EYCE is truly a great asset for EFECW and our young members' work that I feel very grateful for.

Hannah Wehner, EFECW CC member

Photo: EYCE

ECUMENICAL AND WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Women's Platform for Action International and Beijing+30

The Women´s Platform for Action International (WoPAI) was launched in New York on 10 of March 2025 during the 69th Commission on Status of Women – UN Women (10-21 March 2025.)

In 2025, the global community marked the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action which was launched in 1995 in Beijing. (Read further CSW 69 summary report)

WoPAI is an international non-profit women's association. It is an umbrella of women's organisations and informal women's rights groups globally. It is independent of religious and political affiliations.

"The global deterioration of women's living conditions and human rights is accelerating. Everything from pandemics to war affect us worse than men in all social aspects and not least economically. Because we are women we are harassed, beaten, raped, exploited and murdered," said the Chair of WoPAI, Gertrud Åström," We must prioritise the rights of women and girls for the sake of our global future." WoPAI's first action is an open letter of support for United Nations Special Rapporteur for Violence against Women, Reem Alsalem.

Please read more about the actions on Blog | Women's Platform for Action International. Search also among the different organisations affiliated which you already may know and have contact.

Photos: Women's Platform for Action

The seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women will take place at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 9 to 19 March 2026. Who will participate from your countries? Officials and invited partners from the civil society.

Carin Gardbring, EFECW Co-president

Joint Declaration of the Pope and the Ecumenical Patriarch

1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council

"O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever" Psalm 106 (105): 1

On the eve of the feast of Saint Andrew the First-called Apostle, brother of the Apostle Peter and patron of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, we, Pope Leo XIV and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, give heartfelt thanks to God, our merciful Father, for the gift of this fraternal meeting. Following the example of our venerable predecessors, and heeding the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, we continue to walk with firm determination on the path of dialogue, in love and truth (cf. Eph 4:15), towards the hoped-for restoration of full communion between our sister Churches. Aware that Christian unity is not merely the result of human efforts, but a gift that comes from on high, we invite all the members of our Churches – clergy, monastics, consecrated persons, and the lay faithful – earnestly to seek the fulfilment of the prayer that Jesus Christ addressed to the Father: "that they may all be one, even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you… so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21).

The commemoration of the 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, celebrated on the eve of our meeting, was an extraordinary moment of grace. The Council of Nicaea held in 325 AD was a providential event of unity. The purpose for commemorating this event, however, is not simply to call to mind the historical importance of the Council, but to spur us on to be continuously open to the same Holy Spirit who spoke through Nicaea, as we wrestle with the many challenges of our time. We are deeply grateful to all the leaders and delegates of other Churches and ecclesial communities who were willing to participate in this event. In addition to acknowledging the obstacles that prevent the restoration of full communion among all Christians – obstacles which we seek to address through the path of theological dialogue – we must also recognize that what binds us together is the faith expressed in the creed of Nicaea. This is the saving faith in the person of the Son of God, true God from true God, *homoousios* with the Father, who for us and our salvation was incarnate and dwelt among us, was crucified, died and was buried, arose on the third day, ascended into heaven, and will come again to judge the living and the dead. Through the coming of the Son of God, we are initiated into the mystery of the Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and are invited to become, in and through the person of Christ, children of the Father and co-heirs with Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Endowed with this common confession, we can face our shared challenges in bearing witness to the faith expressed at Nicaea with mutual respect, and work together towards concrete solutions with genuine hope.

We are convinced that the commemoration of this significant anniversary can inspire new and courageous steps on the path towards unity. Among its decisions, the First Council of Nicaea also provided the criteria for determining the date of Easter, common for all Christians. We are grateful to divine providence that this year the whole Christian world celebrated Easter on the same day. It is our shared desire to continue the process of exploring a possible solution for celebrating together the Feast of Feasts every year. We hope and pray that all Christians will, "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (*Col* 1:9), commit themselves to the process of arriving at a common celebration of the glorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This year we also commemorate the 60th anniversary of the historic Joint Declaration of our venerable predecessors, Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, which extinguished the exchange of excommunications of 1054. We give thanks to God that this prophetic gesture prompted our Churches to pursue "in a spirit of trust, esteem and mutual charity the dialogue which, with God's help, will lead to living together again, for the greater good of souls and the coming of the kingdom of God, in that full communion of faith, fraternal accord and sacramental life which existed among them during the first thousand years of the life of the Church" (*Joint Declaration of Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras*, 7 December 1965). At the same time, we exhort those who are still hesitant to any form of dialogue, to listen to what the Spirit says to the Churches (cf. *Rev* 2:29), who in the current circumstances of history urges us to present to the world a renewed witness of peace, reconciliation and unity.

Convinced of the importance of dialogue, we express our continued support for the work of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, which in its current phase is examining issues that have historically been considered divisive. Together with the irreplaceable role that theological dialogue plays in the process of rapprochement between our Churches, we also commend the other necessary elements of this process, including fraternal contacts, prayer, and joint work in all those areas where cooperation is already possible. We strongly urge all the faithful of our Churches, and especially the clergy and theologians, to embrace joyously the fruits that have been achieved thus far, and to labor for their continued increase.

The goal of Christian unity includes the objective of contributing in a fundamental and life-giving manner to peace among all peoples. Together we fervently raise our voices in invoking God's gift of peace upon our world. Tragically, in many regions of our world, conflict and violence continue to destroy the lives of so many. We appeal to those who have civil and political responsibilities to do everything possible to ensure that the tragedy of war ceases immediately, and we ask all people of good will to support our entreaty.

In particular, we reject any use of religion and the name of God to justify violence. We believe that authentic interreligious dialogue, far from being a cause of syncretism and confusion, is essential for the coexistence of peoples of different traditions and cultures. Mindful of the 60th anniversary of the declaration *Nostra Aetate*, we exhort all men and women of good will to work together to build a more just and supportive world, and to care for creation, which is entrusted to us by God. Only in this way can the human family overcome indifference, desire for domination, greed for profit and xenophobia.

While we are deeply alarmed by the current international situation, we do not lose hope. God will not abandon humanity. The Father sent his Only-Begotten Son to save us, and the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, bestowed upon us the Holy Spirit, to make us sharers in his divine life, preserving and protecting the sacredness of the human person. By the Holy Spirit we know and experience that God is with us. For this reason, in our prayer we entrust to God every human being, especially those in need, those who experience hunger, loneliness or illness. We invoke upon each member of the human family every grace and blessing so that "their hearts may be encouraged, as they are knit together in love, to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery," who is our Lord Jesus Christ (*Col* 2:2).

Ecumenical Patriarchate

Charta Oecumenica 2025

The revised Charta Oecumenica was launched in Rome on November 5, 2025, originally adopted in 2001. A4-Charta-2-guideline-online.pdf The new version was decided to be launched in April in Vilnius, Lithuania, but because of the funeral of Pope Francis it was postponed.

The revision process started in 2022. In December 2024 we sent our comments to CEC accordingly. Please read more in the EFECW Newsletters autumn 2024 (p.12) and summer 2025 (p.22).

It is interesting to study the new version. The Charta is a working document, not doctrinal, meant to be a process in progress-an Emmaus pilgrimage. Since 2001 much has happendno both in the church and in the society which need to be captured and mirrored in the document. It was said in 2001 that the youth should be an active group carrying the document, but it didn´t happen. Now the opportunities have changed since the youth has got their own chapter 6: Youth in Churches in Ecumenism (II On the way towards the visible unity of the churches).

We wanted the women to be visible in the document and wanted to lift the question of violence towards women and others, but it has been ignored. Women and women´s welfare is still related to family, despite our efforts to contribute. We can recognise a few of our comments incorporated.

Carin Gardbring, EFECW Co-president

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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