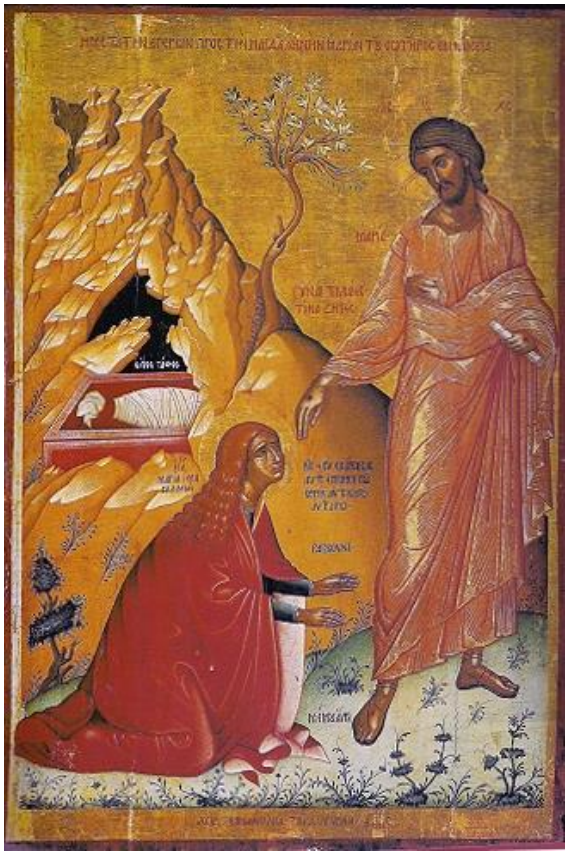
ECUMENICAL FORUM OF EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN WOMEN
FORUM OECUMENIQUE DE FEMMES CHRETIENNES D'EUROPE
ÖKUMENISCHES FORUM CHRISTLICHER FRAUEN IN EUROPA

EFECW News

April 2019



Emmanuel Tzanes: Noli me Tangere. 1657. Corfu, Antivouniotissa Museum. © Ministry of Culture, Archeological Receipts Fund, Athens

At this time, when we, as parts of a split Christianity, celebrate the Resurrection of our Savior, and follow Him on the Way of Passion, seing a lot of suffering all over the world, let us be thankful for the opportunity that is given to us to be good persons; let us be thankful for the opportunity to be heard and recognised and let us as EFECW work together in building a better world!

May the miracle of Easter renew our hope, strengthen our faith, perfect our love and bring joy!

"Mi mou aptou – do not touch me" (John 20:17)

Dear Sisters
I was moved by this icon that I saw in the Byzantine Museum in Corfu during the CC and Neighbourhood Meetings in early March of this year.
The icon doesn't just depict the famous scene between Mary Magdalene and the Risen Christ in the garden by the empty tomb. The painter added almost the whole dialogue between Jesus and Mary to the picture. The icon's name is: "Mi mou aptou" (=Do not touch me). These are the words that Jesus says to Mary after she recognises in him her teacher whose body she wanted to embalm on this early Easter morning. These are also words that are often ignored when women or children say them in situations of domestic or sexual violence.
Here, they are said by a man who was tortured and murdered, and who rose from the dead for the forgiveness of the sins of all humanity, as we confess in all our different Christian denominations. By saying them, Jesus Christ teaches us: the human body remains entirely holy to God, no matter how much violence it has endured.
The human body remains holy. This is an important message for us in these times of crisis for many of our European Churches and societies. Dear Sisters, may it lift each of us up and strengthen us in our life, work and faith. For He is risen – He is truly risen!

Evelyne Zinsstag, EFECW CC member

EFECW Coordinating Committee Meeting
27th February – 3rd March 2019, Corfu, Greece

The second meeting of Coordinating Committee of EFECW was held in Corfu, Greece. This meeting was a good opportunity to the CC to continue to work together and to develop activities on different areas, as well as to join the neighbourhood meeting organised by the Greek Forum for Mediterranean countries and to share the CC message on the topic of violence against women.

During these three effective days, the new CC members, after sharing news from local forums and other activities undertaken by the CC since the last meeting in Vienna and being presented of different aspects of the work of the CC (including a session on finances with the presence of Treasurer Gabi Kienesberger) shared the duties and responsibilities among group members, after setting and deciding on the future activities, as follows:

1. Communication among and with the member Forum organisations of EFECW:
    a. Next CC and NC's meetings and GA preparation (when and where);
    b. New effective ways to develop "inter-forums" relations and to be well informed about each other;
    c. Renew and re-establish contacts with all national Forum members, especially those with less contacts, through neighborhood meetings and visits;
2. The empowerment of young and active women in EFECW, by continue to commit ourselves to the young women's strategy;
3. Larger visibility and presence of EFECW especially in churches, religious, and civil organisations both at national and European level.
4. Develop spiritual guidelines for EFECW.

Marianna Apresyan, EFECW Co-President

Message of the EFECW Coordinating Committee

At the Mediterranean Neighbourhood Meeting

The Coordinating Committee and members of the Mediterranean countries of EFECW gathered in Corfu, Greece to engage with the topic of violence against women. We reflected firstly on the theme in the Bible, with presentations by Myrto Theocharus (Professor, Greek Bible College, Athens) and Despoina Michalaga (Faculty Member, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens). We then considered the current reality of women across Europe as reflected in the Istanbul Convention, presented by Maria Koutatzi (Head of Social Policy and Advocacy, Caritas Greece).

The Istanbul Convention is the first legally-binding instrument to create a comprehensive legal framework and approach to combatting violence against women.

Our call to action

The World Council of Churches released a Statement on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in November 2018 in Uppsala, which was a call for new commitments and contributions to stop, prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence. Reflecting on this and the presentations during our meeting:

1. We urge our members to condemn sexual and gender-based violence and any form of violence against women, children and vulnerable people; to declare such violence a sin;

2. We urge our churches and ecumenical partners to continue working with local organizations and groups in opposition to all forms of sexual and gender-based violence;

3. We support the creation of new and more effective ways for communication and collaboration among churches, and local advocacy groups on gender justice issues, for example the Thursdays in Black Campaign;

4. We urge all remaining European countries to ratify the Istanbul Convention, which focuses on preventing domestic violence, protecting victims and prosecuting accused offenders;

5. We urge all European governments to move quickly to implement the policies and practices that will enable states to enact the Convention;

6.We call for EFECW members to engage nationally on advocacy for the implementation of the Convention.

The CC supporting "Thursdays in Black" campaign.

As the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women, we seek to be voices for peace and reconciliation within our churches, communities and the wider world, and we continue to pray for wisdom, peace, justice and compassion to prevail.

“Save our hope…”

Reflection article on EFECW theme 2018-2022 “Hope”

People often refuse to accept reality. The reasons for this may be different. It is often because they have a different logic that makes reality seems unacceptable. Sometimes reality can be source of suffering. Refusing, or not be able to accept or at least perceive reality could be possible reason to enter in a special mental state, depression and even serious illness.

The reality should mean something that is not illusion and does not depend on the wishes, beliefs or interpretations. Reality is hard to define. In a special way, it is given independent of us, but all of us see it on the way that depends on our soul and our desires or needs. Wishes are often the drivers, but can also be the source of many problems, especially if they are unrealistic. Wishes whose realisation largely takes a lot of energy and even if we achieve success, create an image of our power and can influence a distorted picture of the world around us and our place in it. Sometimes wishes which are unrealistic or hard to achieve can create dissatisfaction with our lives and the reality in which we live. And then, as a way out of this dissatisfaction or even suffering, or even anger, we begin to hope. And then we believe in our hope. This hope and faith have a special power to help us to persevere and survive in difficult situations and make them easier. If it does happen to us that our hope or desire does not realise itself and our reality does not take a very attractive image, it is possible to fall into despair, even anger or weakness. And then? Where to look? How to help

ourselves or a person who stood in the way of hopelessness? Sometimes, the easier situation is being present – just help in the feeling that a person is not alone. But there are times when a person is on the path of hopelessness mind company, because another person is witnessing hopeless-ness. Nobody likes witnesses of their own problems. This is a special way of self-deception.

And then what?

In such a moment the intervention of Grace is recognised. Grace slowly restores hope in our reality and faith in our soul. It is not always easy to stay calm in spirit, let all the barrel and turmoil of everyday reality full of temptations and challenges to go away.

Not easy, but not impossible. That's what saints and righteous people witnessed who, regardless of the circumstances of the reality in which they live, regardless of the difficulties they met, went ahead or not in the visible reality, but in that internal and important to them reality. This is the reality of the spirit which has the power to change; the spirit of the time in which we live. So, if you really want to be living in the present moment of our reality, our prayer to Grace is: ***Save our hope ...***

Marijana Ajzenkol,

EFECW Co-President

French-speaking Mediterranean Neighbourhood meeting

28th February – 3rd March 2019, Corfu, Greece

The 2019 Neighborhood Meeting was held from February 28 to March 1, 2019 on the Greek island of Corfu. Hosted by the Greek Forum 32 representatives from Armenia, Austria, Cyprus, Greece, France, Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, Ukraine together with the EFECW Coordinating Committee, we all enjoyed the meeting in a beautiful surrounding and glorious weather. The Greek Evangelical Church of Corfu as well as the Catholic Archdiocese of Corfu collaborated in this project. The meeting's theme was from John 8:10-11 "Has no one condemned you? …Neither do I condemn you". The keynote speakers were from the Orthodox, the Roman Catholic and Evangelical Church and their speeches were about violence against women and the prevention and protection described in the law of the Bible and modern secular law.

During the neighbourhood meeting, participants had the unique opportunity to attend two other very important and special meetings:

a. The world day of prayer joining in prayer Corfu women from all denominations, and
b. The 200th anniversary celebration of the Hellenic Bible Society, with speeches about the founding of the Ionian Bible Society in Corfu and a concert with music based on the Bible by Corfiot musicians. Corfu is very well known for the numerous excellent bands, orchestras and choirs as well as the great musical tradition they have.

Ersie Antoniadou, Treasurer of Greek EFCW "Damaris the Athenian"

Country presentation: Christian Women Forum of Armenia

Motto: Let us unite in Christ!

The "Christian Women's Forum" charitable organization was founded on March 19, 2014. The members of the Forum are women with different specialties from Armenian Apostolic (Eastern Orthodox), Catholic, Evangelical, Greek Orthodox and Assyrian churches. The Forum was founded by 11 women. The number of members has increased over the years and reached to 30. It is gratifying that young students are also included in the forum.

The Forum members, united by Christian values, operate with the principles of mutual tolerance ready to help vulnerable without any discrimination social groups and, especially to assist women to significantly increase their life quality.

The Armenian Forum during the year organises two big local meetings in February and in December with the aim to discuss projects, tasks; to propose new ideas and suggestions and to implement them. There are also regular meetings with small groups, as well as active contacts in an online platform (Messenger Group discussions on Facebook). The meetings are held in warm atmosphere around tea and coffee, where women talk about projects, interesting ideas that are accompanied by active and cheerful humor.

During these five years the Armenian Forum organised and will organise some important social projects, namely:

"Give me life" - The project is aimed at fighting against the sex-selective abortion in Armenia. The project has informative and educative essence and informs Armenian women about the violence against girl-babies, about the danger of multilayer threats to women's health, about the demographic disaster, etc. The project also provides women with tools to fight against it.

"Ecumenical summer camp" - The motto of the camp is "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). The goal of the camp is to sow among future young women the seeds of love, respect, tolerance, mercy, obedience and humility. The camp started from 2016 in monastic-spiritual places and gather together teenager girls from different churches. Through the camp we prepare new and young women for Armenian Forum who will join / replace us in the future.

"Give me hope for new life" - Spiritual and psychological support to 30 Syrian-Armenian and Iraqi-Armenian women. This project included the trauma healing by Word of God and was based on the book of Ruth in the Bible.

Future projects:

Russian-speaking neighbourhood meeting - From 20th to 22nd September 2019, the Armenian Forum will organize a Neighbourhood meeting of Russian-speaking Forums, in Armenia.

"You are not alone" – From October to December 2019, the Armenian Forum is willing to implement a pilot project for the first time with the support of its members and invited professionals, providing medical, psychological, spiritual and social support to women suffering from breast cancer and to women who have found themselves in a post-surgery dire situation.

The vision of Christian Women's Forum of Armenia is to have a new society which will live by christian values and where women will be protected and will have the good conditions of living and creating in peace.

Marianna Apresyan, EFECW Co-President

Tailoring Workshop

August – December 2018, Novi Sad, Serbia

In 2017, the Ecumenical forum of Christian women in Vojvodina developed a project "EHO tailoring workshop/course in Novi Sad, supported by the JSL fund and 13 women from various marginalized groups (mostly women with disabilities and Roma women) were taught the sewing skills necessary to secure employment in tailor shops and factories in the textile and automobile industries. Due to a great interest in the course among marginalized women in Novi Sad, we organized continuation of previous workshop for an additional 6 women in 2018.

The statistics show that un-employment rates are much higher among women. Women in Serbia comprise 42% of the workforce, meaning that 16% fewer women than men are in employment. Women with disabilities are in a particularly poor position. In 2016, in the northern part of Serbia, where EHO operates, 6,883 people with disabilities were in employment, of which only 31% were women. Women with disabilities are of a significantly lower poorer education level compared to women from the population. Some surveys show that they are undereducated and that up to 80% of girls with disabilities never finish school. The situation is similar in other categories of marginalized groups of women, who due to unemployment are economically dependent and thus in greater danger of falling victims to various forms of discrimination and domestic abuse. By empowering and training women from marginalized groups we seek to contribute to their independence, build their self-confidence and thus improve their social inclusion.

In order to improve the socio- economic and mental status of women the Ecumenical forum of Christian women from Novi Sad continued organizing sewing course for 6 women categorized as difficult to employ.

We have engaged two instructors (workshop leaders), prepared and serviced machines and additional equipment. The course started on September 5th and was organized once per week, each Wednesday for four hours until the end of December. A total of 60 hours of theoretical and practical classes were held (15 times) and was enough to master the sewing of skirts, pants, dresses and shirts. This knowledge and skills they have gained enabled them to provide tailoring services in their communities. Thanks to this course and workshop two women started providing tailoring service in their communities and improved their income.

International Committee for the Fellowship of the Least Coin

Annual meeting, Bangkok, Thailand

2018 was a special year for the ICFLC International Committee for the *Fellowship of the Least Coin* Annual Meeting because it was linked – as every four years - to a special General Assembly of the ACWC Asian Church Women's Conference. Founded only two years after the start of the Fellowship of the Least Coin from amidst of her members our Asian Christian sisters celebrated their 60th anniversary with a festive 16th Assembly titled: "Now choose life, change our ways and actions" which took place from October 4th to 7th in Bangkok, Thailand, in the premises of the headquarters of the CCA Christian Conference of Asia. About 150 women were present. Emphasis was laid on choosing as Christian women for the dignity of all and to fight for human rights for women to prevent them from being slaves or victims of all sorts of violence including trafficking of women and girls. Practical examples were given like Talita Kum Thailand, an anti-trafficking movement of catholic women religious, to raise awareness among priests, monks and bishops in this origin, transit and destination country. Other social challenges are domestic violence, teenager pregnancies, and surrogate mums. "Thailand is the womb of Asia." Through the national reports of the sixteen participating Asian countries - three other member countries could not make it - and the problems and burning issues they brought to the Assembly, it became clear what women and their churches have to (continue to) do in the coming years. Forced and unpaid or underpaid labour of children and women - often to care for their families – as a form of modern economic slavery were brought to the table, as well as poverty being the main reason for social injustice giving no perspective for the future especially for the young generation. Why do often only women feel responsible for their families? Furthermore: the vulnerable position of tribal people and tribal girls in need through domestic violence and forced and early marriages; refugee women, especially Rohingyas fleeing from Myanmar to other countries; the increasing suicide rate of women because of stress and oppression; alcoholism causing many family problems and domestic violence; pollution in quickly developing countries; and the list is even not closed.
It became very clear to me as a European woman how similar and global these social economic problems are and how they are affecting first and foremost women and children all over the world. Solidarity is needed still and more than ever!

In the smaller bible study groups, more personal testimonies were spoken out as we explored the theme more in depth. The emphasis was put on praying and finding more time in our busy lives "to serve the Lord" as it was formulated, meaning working more in church and Sunday school without neglecting own family life and job. Materialism and big money do not make us happy. We should read more in the bible. Stop the old life and repent. Meaning: to break with the old religion, changing from Buddhism to Christianity because only Jesus can help us. Some women were grateful to the missionaries who brought the Gospel and freed people from Buddhism and Hinduism though it was often by force. The generation of the grandparents were promised a job if they became Christians. They said: the missionaries freed us from the taboo of those religions forbidding for example to go

out when the birds are singing or venerating many gods. Now we are true and free Christians while our grandparents had no choice.

On her 60th anniversary great changes were decided to secure the future of ACWC. After a year of transition there will be no more Executive Secretary but a president and four regional vice presidents, one for each part of Asia, all volunteers.

After having been a guest to this festive anniversary event and having brought our greetings and congratulations to the ACWC sisters, ICFLC held her 38th Annual Meeting – for the first time with our new Executive Secretary Lisa Lamis - bringing reports from the regional coordinators and granting more than twenty projects from all over the globe which were presented by the regional coordinators as well as scholarships to several young applicants from Asia, Africa and Latin America. A new chair was chosen, the youngest in the ICFLC history ever: Awit Marcelino (33) from WICC Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada, who had been vice chair during the last two years. The newly elected vice chair is Lydia Mwaniki from Kenya working with AACC (All Africa Conference of Churches) on the desk for Theology, Family Life and Gender Justice. Ghana in West Afrika will be the place for the next ICFLC Annual Meeting in October 2019. We are happy and excited about this friendly invitation to see how our African sisters are living and working in the FLC movement!

Martina Heinrichs, ICFLC Regional Coordinator Europe

On behalf of EFECW Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women

The devastating power of fire
shows us how fragile both our lives and things are.
Yet, from the ashes rises the spirit of
Hope; Confidence; Affirmation of life.
Blessed Easter,
Catherine Gyarmathy

Please support:

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

and the **Ruth-Epting Fund** (www.efecw.net)

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

info@efecw.net