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

EFECW News

December 2018

1.*Illustration information: "José y Maria" by Everett Patterson.*

"I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice." (Ez 34:15-16, NRSV)

God comes to restore order in the chaos of our lives, to restore the suffering world by letting justice rain down on it – like in this Christmas image. This is what the prophet Ezekiel promises in these verses. We see this promise fulfilled in his son Jesus Christ: human God – God-with-us. God who teaches us to perceive each person as God's own beloved child.

To see and to accept God in my neighbours, whoever they are: I have failed to live up to this many times in the past year. And I am sure that many of you, dear women, experience this difficulty every day in your work with marginalised people of society: people who live through sickness, hunger and homelessness; people who had to flee their own country and are now stranded somewhere in Europe without a helping hand. How much easier is it to simply look away than to face the injustice and inequality of this world. How much more difficult is it to work as an advocate for these people and to tirelessly search for the means to help them in their hardship!

How many cars might have passed this lost-looking Hispanic-American couple without slowing down in this rainy night? The man with his haggard face looks kind of dangerous – would I invite him into my car? The woman looks much less threatening – but given her condition, it could be risky too ... Passing them quickly, few people will have perceived the holiness that radiates from this scene. We who can contemplate the image at length are more fortunate. The American illustrator Everett Patterson says he has hidden at least 12 symbols of Advent and Christmas in it. How many can you find?

The verses of prophet Ezekiel for example were placed as a graffito on the telephone pole: "ZEKE 3415-16". A phone number scribbled somewhere becomes the discreet sign of a divine promise. Suddenly, the crown above “Dave's City Motel” becomes more than a mere decoration. And the stickers on the window behind the heads of “José y Maria” begin to resemble halos... The longer I contemplate the image, the more “glad tidings” I discover, signs of joy in the apparent sadness. This is how God changes the world: by transforming our hearts with love; by caring for our wounds through his faithful presence; by being injured himself, as the wooden beam in front of the sidewalk indicates: A symbol of the cross. Yes, this is the mysterious “Good News” of Christmas: God is really with us. Just look around you: It’s raining already.

Evelyne Zinsstag, EFECW Co-ordinating Committee

May this year’s Christmas inspire us to look at the world

with renewed faith in God’s love;

may the Holy Spirit refresh our hearts and souls in these holy days.

A blessed Christmas to all!

EFECW Coordinating Committee meeting

15th–18th November 2018, Vienna, Austria

The first meeting of the newly elected Coordinating Committee of EFECW was held in Vienna. This meeting gave an opportunity to the CC on the one hand to get to know each other better and build a strong team and on the other hand to define the new priorities of the EFECW strategy. The meeting included a one-day facilitated team-building activity as well as a warm meeting around dinner (organised by the Austrian forum) with Austrian sisters Regina Augustin (NC), Inge Schintlmeister, Evelyn Martin, and Mari Balmanyan.

During these three effective days, the new CC members, after sharing news since the GA and being presented of different aspects of the work of the CC (including a session on finances with the presence of ex-Treasurer Hannah Golda) shared the duties and responsibilities among group members, after setting and deciding on the future goals and expectations. The following will be among the work priorities for the next four years:

1. The empowerment of young and active women in EFECW, by continue to commit to the young women's strategy;
2. Re-new and re-establish contacts with all national Forum members, especially those with less contacts, through neighborhood meetings and visits;
3. Larger visibility and presence of EFECW especially in churches, religious, and civil organisations both at national and European level.
4. Continue on developing spiritual guidelines for EFECW.
5. Organising next CC meetings, the NC meeting in 2020 and the next General Assembly in 2022.

Marianna Apresyan, EFECW Co-President

10th General Assembly

"If you remain silent at this time…" (Esther 4:14): Christian women speak out

7th-12th August 2018, Sveti Nikolaj Monastery, Soko Grad, Serbia

The 10th General Assembly was organized successfully, at Sveti Nikolaj (St. Nicolas) orthodox monastery, in Soko Grad, Serbia from 7th to 12th August 2018. Around 100 women, including a group of young women stewards and local participants, from 24 countries came together to reflect, to plan, to decide, to pray, to share, to exchange and to celebrate in ecumenical sisterhood (annex 1 – participants' list).

The General Assembly (GA) is the highest decision-making body of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women. Meeting every four years it evaluates the past period and formulates the vision and programmatic priorities for the next years as well as elects the new leadership. It is at the same time a space to share joys and sorrows, struggles and successes, to exchange the gifts of our varied spiritualities and diverse cultures. It is a space where we reflect on our situation as Christian women in Europe and raise our awareness about pressing issues in different corners of Europe as well as on our continent as such. Last but certainly not least, it also serves to empower young women and the women from the local Ecumenical Forum. The aim is that at the end the life of the Forum is reenergized and the participants are motivated to go ahead, pursue the priorities communally discerned and embrace the tasks in front of them.

The programme of the General Assembly was composed of:

- An exploration of the theme "If you remain silent in this time... (Esther 4:14) Christian women speak out" with a variety of methods: key-note speakers, workshops, world café, and creative workshops;
- Several business sessions for reporting on the past but also planning the future of the organization, reconfirming vision and mission, developing a final message describing main priority areas for the coming 4 years (annex 3 – final message) as well as electing the new leadership team;
- A personal and group spiritual journey, including a pilgrimage to the cross reflecting and praying on the ten commandments;
- Numerous opportunities for socializing, networking, sharing and experiencing Serbian culture: prayer time, networking session, cultural events, excursion, etc.

New Leadership Team

Co-Presidents

Marijana Ajzenkol, Roman Catholic, Serbia

Marianna Apresyan, Armenian Apostolic, Armenia

Fiona Buchanan, Presbyterian, Scotland, UK

Co-ordinating Committee

Carin Gardbring, Lutheran, Sweden

Natalia Horbal, Greek Catholic, Ukraine

Anne-Marie Schott, Roman Catholic, France

Eveline Zinsstag, Reformed, Switzerland

Treasurer

Gabriele Kienesberger, Roman Catholic, Austria

Key-note speakers

Ivana Kronja, Ph.D., was born in Belgrade in 1970.

She is a film scholar, film critic, and theorist of culture and the media, a member of Serbian National Academy for Film Art and Science (AFUN) and professor at Fine and Applied Arts School, Applied Sciences' University, Belgrade. Her speech upon the theme ''Politics, Media Culture, Women and Society: a view from the semi-periphery of Europe" considered multi-layered and often contradictory media messages, representations of women in cinema and the media, and sets of beliefs regarding an overall contribution and importance of women in public arena and local and global society, media, religion, and culture. The role of women is most often seen in terms of stereotypes and as something insufficiently affirmative, but many of us fight such simplified representations, acting actively, in spite of lots of difficulties, in our public and social space.

Svenka Savić, Professor Emeritus and coordinator for the Gender Studies Center at the University of Novi Sad, has published three books with topics on gender and religion: *Feminist Theology* (1999), *Gender Perspective in Inter-Religious Dialogue in the XXI Century* (2009) (co-authored with Rebeka Jadranka Anić), and *Women Pastors' Contribution to Peacebuilding in Protestant Churches in Vojvodina (2017).* She has organized numerous panels, workshops, etc., on gender, religion, and reconciliation.

In her speech: "Us and others in Today's context in Serbia" she focused on Human Rights for Roma people and people with special needs: *"In my approach I would like to link foundational Christian values with what is in essence an ideology about human rights and in feminist theories, to show that in today's context we face many challenges where we could prove our capabilities to care for all women who are deprived of their own human rights, women's rights and others (women victims of domestic violence during wars in Yugoslav regions at the end of nineties, but also those women who showed their extraordinary capabilities, primarily handicapped women, women in Roma communities, and others).*

Kathy Galloway is from Edinburgh, Scotland, trained in divinity and pastoral studies at the University of Glasgow, and was ordained as a minister of the Church of Scotland in 1977. Previous posts include work for international development and Scottish anti-poverty agencies and non-church bodies, including media and universities. The major focus of her work has always been with people living in poverty, with women, and with the use of creative arts. She is she author of nine books on theology and spirituality and four collections of poetry.

Kathy Galloway closed her contribution to the theme of the GA with the following words: "*In the midst of all our struggles is Jesus, saying 'Do not be afraid'. These words do not come from someone who had a comfortable life, an easy faith and a peaceful death. They come from someone who knew fear, loneliness and desolation, and at the end knew great doubt. Of his own free choice, Jesus bound himself to suffering humanity, to the poor and outcast of the world, to the way not of power but of love, of peace and not violence. And at the heart of these was his binding of himself in trust to the mystery of God's love, which would always be faithful.*"

Workshops A

a. ***Women count in peace building,*** *Carin Gardbring*

Women, peace and security. An everyday task for women at all levels in the society; in the family, in the church and the local society, at the national and global level. In 2000, the UN Security Council adopted the resolution 1325 focusing on women´s participation, protection of women, prevention of violence against women and women´s inclusion in peace-building and recovery. Soon 20 years have passed and during the path for the future the worlds and women´s challenges are the Strategic Development Goals (SDGs) until 2030. Goal 16 works towards peacefully and inclusive societies, and the workshop offered a space to share experiences of women in peace building while inspiring and strengthening one another.

b. ***Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment,*** *Nataliya Horbal and Ulyana Kuzymchak*

Women's economic empowerment is essential to: (a) improve quality of life for women, men, families and communities; (b) establish more stable and just societies; (c) build strong economies; (d) achieve internationally-agreed goals for development, sustainability and human rights. The workshop explored opportunities and women's role in empowerment; problems and ways of empowering of women to participate fully in economic life; key elements for promoting gender equality in the workplace, marketplace and community; and ways to encourage small project-development for women's empowerment.

c. ***We cannot be silent – meeting the challenges of leading in our churches,*** *Anthea Sully*

Based on the leadership shown by Esther and Vashti, as well as other significant women in the Bible, who were working within the male hierarchies of their time, the workshop questioned women's leadership in own contemporary contexts, by using images from art and by sharing experiences with each other. The outcomes of the report 'The Leading Question; women in leadership in churches' developed with a Jacqueline Stuyt Legacy grant was also used to inform the conversation.

d. ***Ecclesiology in times of migration,*** *Katerina Pekridou*

The workshop explored how churches in Europe are being shaped by the reality of migration. It highlighted some of the results of the consultation 'Being Church in Europe Today: Migration and Ecclesiology' of December 2016, a European response to the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order document 'The Church: Towards a Common Vision.' The workshop examined pastoral and theological perspectives on migration in the context of the global dialogue on what it means to be a Church.

e. ***Disability in the planetarian age,*** *Mima Ruzicic Novkovic*

After showing the documentary "Lives worth living" (54 min.) on the history of disability movement in the USA, the cross-cutting issues based on the facts from documentary, personal experiences and the role of the contemporary social activism in responding to the changing perspective of identity (ies) and interdependence among people were discussed.

f. ***Creating new Forum Groups,*** *Angela Sestrini, Eirini Kakavelaki, and Maria Lyraki*

Sharing the experience of the Greek Ecumenical Forum of Christian women. An open discussion on how to motivate women in provincial cities to participate, share the Forum's vision and create their own Forum groups in cooperation with the main group at the national level.

Workshops B

1. **Participating in God's Mission with what you have, right where you are – and as a prayer,** *Martina Heinrichs & Liza Lamis (ICFLC)*

Fellowship of the Least Coin, the FLC as a global, ecumenical movement of prayer for Justice, Peace and Reconciliation supports initiatives and projects by and for women and children in need, through prayers accompanied by a modest financial grant as a token. Thus it is crucial for the FLC to know the issues that women throughout the world confront in these times.

The workshop worked around the following questions: (1) What urgent issues do European Christian women struggle with? How would they respond? (2) How to strengthen further the FLC movement as a venue of ecumenical learning, solidarity and praying together?

2. **Megilla Esther in Judaistic and Christian tradition in the Netherlands**, *Haydy Nelson*

The Book of Esther in the Bible reaches the whole Jewish and Christian world. Therefore one can read and understand this in several ways according to one's position, tradition, knowledge and experience. Three courageous women, Vashti, Esther, and Zeres are mentioned, playing their own role as feminist in a multi-cultural society in the Middle East.

3. **Self-assertion and self-care in a male dominated work environment. Exploring strategic behaviours with Esther and Washti**, *Evelyne Zinsstag*

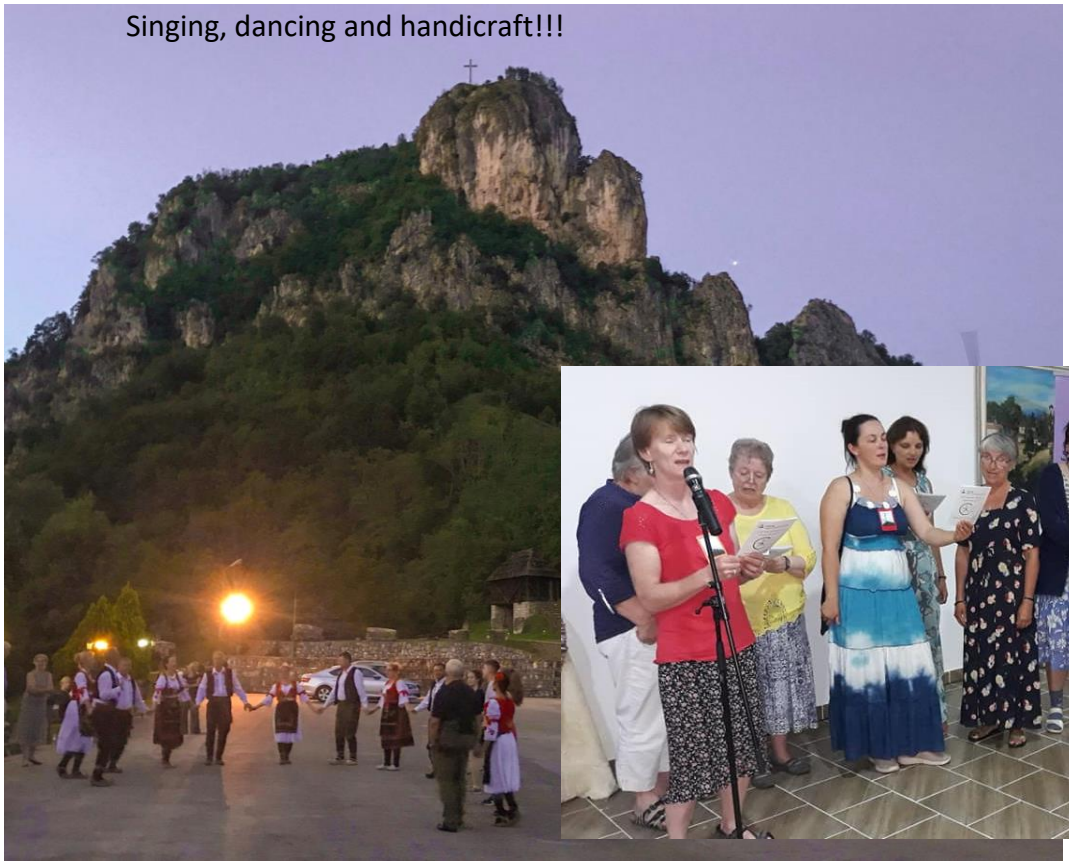
The workshop tried to find strategies for self-assertion and self-care in male dominated work environments through a close reading of texts from the book of Esther. Close look at parts of the story of Esther and Washti and discussion around their respective behaviour as described and commented on. The workshop offered a space for sharing women's experiences in working in male dominated teams in our churches or church organisations. Finally, helpful strategies for self-care and self-assertion in the characters of Esther and Washti and ways to transfer them into our workplaces were explored.

4. **In times of crisis, forsaking silence in service of the Word**, *Sr. Dr. Giovanna Maria Muha CJ*

In an alienating world, in which authentic spiritual communion can sometimes be replaced by meaningless and random online social interactions, with the ever-growing industry of New Age self-help and quick-fix solutions being advertised as a legitimate substitute for the Word of God, it is Christians in general and Christian women in particular who must find the courage, determination, and resources to speak up. By forsaking false spiritualities and falling back on the sacred teachings of Christ, it is important to become the voice of the voiceless and the power of the powerless. If Esther were a 21st century Christian woman, what would her mission include? The workshop focused in recognising "Mordecai" and "Haman", to distinguish between genuinely Christian intentions and those only posing as such. It is the Christian woman's sacred duty to speak truth to power, just like Esther did, by defending the Word of God even when her stance might be unpopular and even dangerous.

Creative workshops

Singing, dancing and handicraft!!!



Young women empowerment –Stewards' Programme

"I learned about the Forum through my church's website, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. I've been involved in various women's rights projects, and I thought it would be an interesting perspective to look into this issues through the Forum's work. I applied to work as a steward for the #efecwGA2018, because I want to deepen my knowledge of ecumenism. I somehow feel as a Finnish woman that we have equal rights with men, but I want to learn what's going on in other countries and what rights women in churches of other denominations have."

Kaisa Rahko, 23, Theology student at University of Helsinki

Special thanks for their financial support:

Weltweit Gemeinden helfen GAW

Fellowship of the Least Coin

SKF Schweizerischer Katholischer Frauenbund
Ligue suisse des femmes catholiques
Unione svizzera delle donne cattoliche
Uniun svizra da as dunnas catolicas

Renovabis
Solidaritätsaktion der deutschen Katholiken mit den Menschen in Mittel- und Osteuropa

Congregatio Jesu
Mitteleuropäische Provinz

St. Colm's Fund -Dutch Sisters' Organisation-Ruth Epting Fund-Orthodox Monastery Sv. Nikolaj

Final Message

If You Remain Silent in this Time… (Esther 4:14)

Over 100 members of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women gathered together from 24 countries and from all traditions of the Christian family to share in prayer, fellowship, discussion and pilgrimage. We met at the Orthodox Monastery Sveti Nikolaj, Soko Grad, Serbia. We thank the local women who have welcomed us, and the people of the Monastery who have been such generous hosts.

With prayerful reflection on the book of Esther and guided by the text "if you remain silent in this time", we discussed what it means to speak out as women in our churches about the issues we face within our contexts.

We will speak out:

- About the invisibility of women within our churches
- About the importance of women's social, political and economic empowerment
- Against rape, abuse, torture and violence against women
- About the importance of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue
- To support the human rights of everyone, especially migrants and those seeking asylum
- Against populist propaganda
- About the role of women in peace-building

We stand together with our sisters to achieve the recognition and meaningful participation of women within our churches.

We will continue to develop and support projects that contribute to the social, political and economic empowerment of women.

2018 marks the 20th anniversary of the end of the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Decade in Solidarity with Women. We regret that there is still a need to address its original priorities, and urge all churches to recommit to these. In particular we call for the support of governmental ratification of the Istanbul Convention, as well as the *Thursdays in Black* and *White Ribbon* campaigns, which demand an end to violence against women.

We walk together with women of all Christian denominations and all faiths on our journey towards equality and celebrate our participation as members of the *Side by Side* Movement for gender justice.

We will challenge current European and national laws and policies which lead women to undertake unnecessary acts of survival, resulting in a loss of human dignity. We will work in solidarity with women who are at the mercy of traffickers and smugglers.

We provide a platform for women to share knowledge, raise awareness, and to develop an informed opinion on issues women face today.

We seek to be voices for peace and reconciliation within our churches, communities and the wider world.

We have been on pilgrimage together and created a space to share and express our spirituality. Renewed by our gathering, may God lead us on our way with joy and peace as signs of Christ's love on earth.

The message has been translated in several European languages and published in local, national and international level (find text in other languages at http://www.efecw.net/activities/general-assemblies.html).

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