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

EFECW News

December 2017

A Toast on the Eve
Where is the star that beckons to the east,
That God come down to bless the flesh
Of living? O give us the daily yeast
To burble through the veins and charm
Our sour grapes into wine. Find me the crèche
Where a god is cradled by a woman's arm.
Michael O'Siadhail

We pray that in our common endeavour to establish peace, to encourage the fearful, to comfort the traumatised, to love the poor and in them to find afresh the Christ-child born in poverty, that we may all be gripped again by the simplicity of the action of God which has brought us a church, suffering, yes, but full of hope and strength in the gift of the Spirit.

Christmas greetings and blessings for a peaceful and happy new year!
EFECW Coordinating Committee

INVITATION

The Co-Presidents, the Co-Ordination Committee and the Serbian Forum

invite the National Coordinators and other delegates to Soko Grad, in Serbia to the

Xth General Assembly

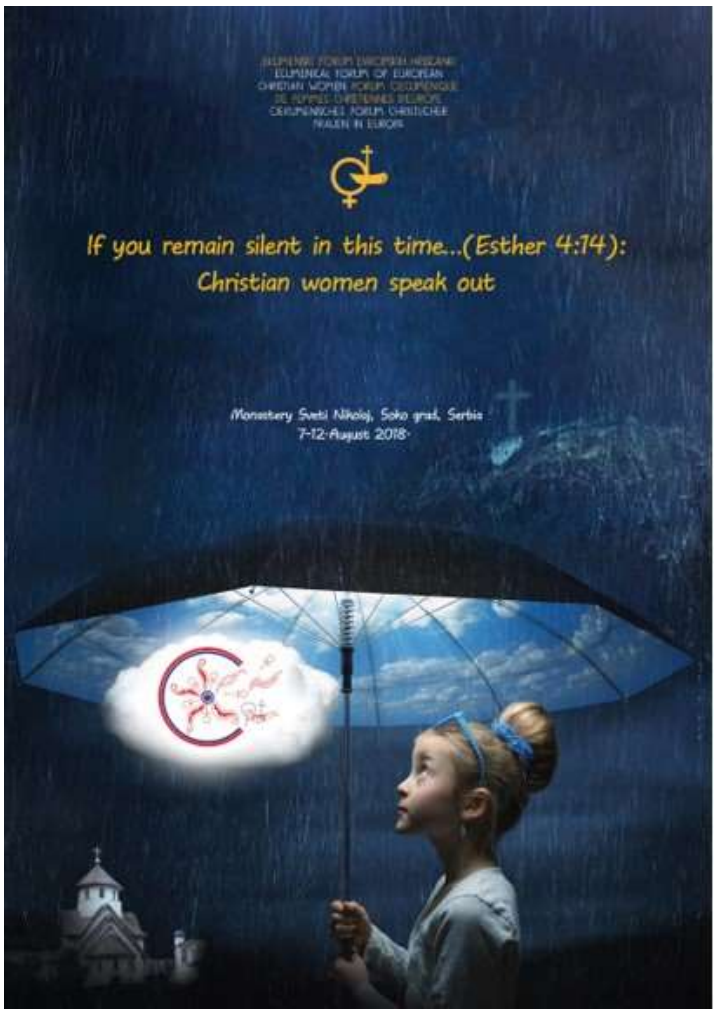
from 7th – 12th August 2018, with the theme: "If you remain silent at this time…"

(Esther 4:14): Christian women speak out.

About the theme

Esther is an example of courage in face of difficult circumstances. An example many women in history followed and we are also invited in our own lives and contexts to emulate. Like Esther we are invited not to remain silent in our safety and complacency, but act and speak out. At the GA participants will discuss and explore ways what it means today not to remain silent.

About the venue: Monastery St. Nikolaj, Soko Grad



Soko Town is a fortress in western Serbia near Ljubovija. Soko Town was founded in the medieval Serbia, but its most famous role was the one it played during the Ottoman rule over Serbia when it became one of the most infamous sites of torture of Orthodox people. Some of the earliest data go back as far as 1476 including the mention of the fortress' commander Sokol Kemal. Soko Town was invincible until 1862 when, under pressure from the world's most powerful countries, the Turks handed it over to the Serbs who tore it down for most part on their allies' request after the Turkish army had surrendered. Today there are very few remains of the walls and towers, and within the fortification itself a concrete plateau was built with a big cross on it. The bishop of Savac, Lavrentije, founded a monastery at the foot of Soko Town dedicated to Arcbishop Nikolaj Velimirovic. By the scenic road that leads from the monastery to the fort there have been built 10 stone chapels duly painted and inscribed with one of the Ten Commandments respectively. The iconostase in the chapel of the monastery is done by painter sister Krstana Tasic.

The Monastery will be both the venue of our Assembly and the accommodation site.

500 years of Reformation

The year of the 500th Anniversary of the Wittenberg Reformation – 2017 – is nearing to the end. As our small contribution to its commemoration we wanted to dedicate this Newsletter partly to this half-a-millennium occasion. How has this year been? And what can we, women of the 21st century Europe, learn from this legacy?

An ecumenical centenary

In my experience it was a year of many, many ecumenical events to mark the anniversary. It started with one of the ecumenically most significant events – the moving ecumenical worship service at the Lutheran cathedral in Lund, Sweden, on 31 October 2016 led by the pope Francis together with the president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) bishop Munib Younan and the general secretary of the LWF Martin Junge in which representatives of a great number of different churches and ecumenical organizations participated. Never before in the history had a pope and such a large number of different churches' leaders commemorated with Protestants a Reformation anniversary.

It was a clear expression of the changed context in which we now live. It was also an embodiment of the ecumenical efforts in the last 50 years, as for example the ecumenical document From Conflict to Communion (FCTC)[1] says: "Since Catholics and Lutherans are bound to one another in the body of Christ as members of it, then it is true of them what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:26: »If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.« What affects one member of the body also affects all the others. For this reason, when Lutheran Christians remember the events that led to the particular formation of their churches, they do not wish to do

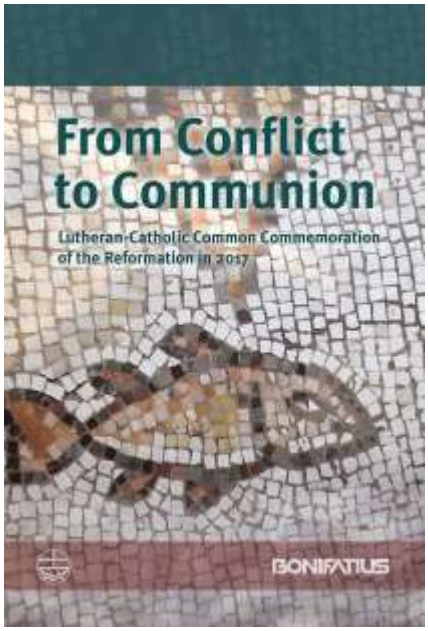
so without their Catholic fellow Christians. In remembering with each other the beginning of the Reformation, they are taking their baptism seriously." (FCTC 221) Moreover the Reformation anniversary did not want to be and was not a thing only between Lutherans and Catholics. "Lutherans also realize that what they are thanking God for is not a gift that they can claim only for themselves. They want to share this gift with all other Christians. For this reason "they invite all Christians to celebrate with them." (FCTC 226)

[1] *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt and Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2013. Available online at https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-conflict-communion-basis-lutheran-catholic-commemoration-reformation-2017 .

It was beautiful to see, participate in, and know of so many ecumenical events – starting from worship services, conferences, exhibitions, to cultural events and shared meals… and most of all to shared stories, joys and struggles, shared faith … I am grateful for this immense fruit of the anniversary which has, I believe, brought Christians of all faiths closer together on the journey towards unity.

The three elements that many of these events, especially the worship services, consisted of, are also significant: joy and gratefulness for the good fruits the Reformation gave impetus to, repentance and regret on both sides for the wounds and division it lead to, and a common look forward with commitment to share the gospel together and to continue on the journey towards full visible unity. I believe these elements should not remain part of 2017 but should continue to guide us until the prayer of Jesus that "they all may be one" is realized. We should always rejoice together from the gifts we receive from the hand of God, we should always be attentive to words and actions that hurt the other and contribute to our separation as well as repent for the moments when we have not been faithful to the Gospel and not loved others as ourselves, and we should daily renew our commitment to unity and always put gospel at the centre and strive to carry it to the world together.

The Gospel in the centre



Reformation of the 16th century was, in fact, similarly like the reform movements in previous and following centuries in various parts of Christianity, aiming at the return to the central Christian message – the Gospel about merciful and forgiving God loving humanity and this world so much that he became part of it and died for it. This merciful God calls us all to be merciful, forgiving and loving to others and so be God's image in this world. This is the main message of the Reformation and of every renewal of the church. In this way the church should be always reforming – *ecclesia semper reformanda* – always and constantly coming back to the Gospel.

Therefore, the best way to remember these events, not just in 2017 but any time, is the one expressed in the Foreword to the above cited ecumenical report: "Christians will most fittingly look back on events that occurred 500 years earlier by putting the gospel of Jesus Christ at the center." [2] The authors of the Common Prayer used many times in ecumenical worships for the commemoration of the anniversary (including the one with pope Francis) advised: "The commemoration of the Reformation should be a celebration of Jesus Christ since the reformers saw their main task in pointing to Christ as "the way, the truth, and the life" and calling people to trust in Christ. Christ should be celebrated. Martin Luther and the other reformers only sought to be "witnesses to Christ.""[3]

Always coming back to Jesus and to the Gospel has one significant effect – it creates unity. The Gospel is the point where we all started, where we all come from, coming back to that point, returning together to that center will bring us back to each other.

[2] FCTC, Foreword, p. 7; cf. also par. 245.

[3] *Common Prayer* (2016), available online at https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/joint-common-prayer-lutheran-catholic-common-commemoration-reformation-2017, p. 8.

Never give up listening to one another

At the time of Reformation, the protagonists on both sides, however, failed vastly in one thing. They failed to really listen to each other, they fell short to see brothers and sisters in the others. They "frequently not only misunderstood but also exaggerated and caricatured their opponents in order to make them look ridiculous. They repeatedly violated the eighth commandment, which prohibits bearing false witness against one's neighbor. Even if the opponents were sometimes intellectually fair to one another, their willingness to hear the other and to take [their] concerns seriously was insufficient. The controversialists wanted to refute and overcome their opponents, often deliberately exacerbating conflicts rather than seeking solutions by looking for what they held in common. Prejudices and misunderstandings played a great role in the characterization of the other side. Oppositions were constructed and handed down to the next generation." (FCTC 233) For this reason, the reason of human weakness and sinfulness, the body of Christ was wounded and divided.

Along with the positive lesson of always retuning to the origin, to the center, to the Gospel, we should take from the history of Reformation this profound negative lesson: we should never repeat this grave mistake of our predecessors. We have to learn the essential importance of listening to each other, listening patiently, even if we do not understand or agree, never giving up on dialogue, listening without accusing and even without judging. One of the main reasons of the conflicts in our families, communities, and in the world is that the opposing sides stop listening, and often even communicating. They stop seeing sisters and brothers in the eyes of the other and exchange the real image of the other for the image of an enemy.

The problem of Protestants and Catholics in the Reformation and the centuries that followed was also that they "often focused on what separated them from each other rather than looking for what united them."[4] Talking about differences is necessary. It can even be a great and enriching thing. But focusing on differences can obscure the things that we have in common and lead us to separation. We should never let go off our minds that we all were created in God's image, out of God's love and that it was God's plan for each one of us to be here. We Christians should never forget that there is much more in our faith that we have in common than what separates us.

If we as the Forum want to be a recognized voice, a voice of hope in our continent and perhaps even beyond it, we must always start with listening, listening patiently and emphatically, listening first even to those with whom we disagree or whom we don't understand. And we should always start with and keep in mind that which we share with the other, which we have in common, whether we talk among ourselves or with someone outside of the Forum.

Courageous women of the Reformation

It takes courage sometimes to choose a road different from the one the world is taking. This is true whether we talk about listening to someone who is different (and perhaps can challenge us and our stereotypes) or whether we talk about speaking out. But women of faith don't lack in examples from the past (and present) of courageous women. One of them – Esther – will be our companion at the upcoming General Assembly. A number of them we find – practically unknown and hidden until just recently – looking at the time of Reformation.

[4] *Common Prayer*, p. 14.

One wonderful thing that happened in the period leading to 2017 in preparation for the 500th anniversary was a lot of research that was conducted in different parts of Europe about the feminine side of the Reformation. A number of women who played role, often significant, albeit in the background, were discovered and unveiled. All of them share one common trait – they were courageous women. Whether it was Marie Denetière who challenged the city council of Geneva reasoning from the Scripture in favor of women preachers, Katharina Schütz Zell who in Strasbourg helped refugees regardless of their faith, Magdalena von Staupitz who as a single woman stood at the beginning and led as the headmistress a school for girls in which young girls from all classes, not just the nobility, were provided education, or the duchess Elisabeth von Rochlitz who as a widow joined the Schmalkaldic League (a defensive military alliance of Lutheran princes) and functioned as a secret agent, a task for which she even invented a secret script[5] … to name just a few. These women were formed by the Reformation and they shaped it. But they were often for their actions mocked, humiliated, rebuked by the authorities, facing danger, experiencing loss, suffering and misunderstanding. Yet, they spoke up for righteousness, on behalf of the marginalized, putting to the forefront God who is first and foremost merciful, never hurting and violent and never exclusive when it comes to love and grace. They took inspiration and comfort in the Scripture. These women are a treasure God gave to us through the Reformation and we are invited to learn about and from them and take an example from their courage.

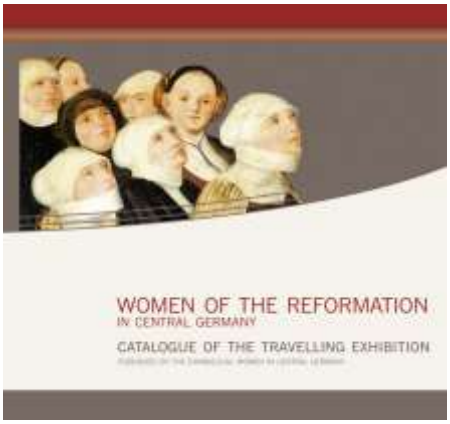
Thanks to these women and to the recent research we can better realize that "the Reformation was a collective effort to which women also contributed."[6] It takes a community for a renewal and reform in the church to take place and become deeply rooted. The same is true for the renewal that we are called to bring about today through the ecumenical movement. Each one of us has a role in it and can contribute. And this is very much in line with the understanding of common priesthood of all believers in which we all participate through baptism and which was also rediscovered and stressed by the Reformation.

---

[5] *"For those reading German, you can find stories of some of these courageous women and of many others on the website www.reformatorinnen.de ."*

[6] *Women of the Reformation in Central Germany*, Catalogue of the Travelling Exhibition (Evangelische Frauen in Mitteldeutschland, 2014), p.7.

Thus remembering this year the 500 years of Reformation we are invited to take both positive and negative lessons from it for our faith and on our journey to unity: 1. the need to always return to the foundation of our common faith – the Gospel – to the mercy with which we were received and to which we are called; 2. the necessity to really listen to the other and focus on what we have in common; and 3. the courage to contribute with our talents and voices, to speak up so that this world is a better place for everybody and more conform to the will of God which created all of us to God's image.



Women of the Reformation in Central Germany: Catalogue of the travelling exhibition

This catalogue of an exhibition with portraits of German women of the reformation (also available in German) can be ordered at:

Evangelical Women in Central Germany,
Kleiner Berlin 2, D 06108 Halle (Saale)
Tel: +49 345-5484880
www.frauenarbeit-ekm.de
Email: frauen-reformation@ekmd.de

5 ecumenical commitments

The document "From Conflict to Communion" which already in its title expresses beautifully the journey and the direction on which we are together expressed it powerfully in 5 ecumenical commitments which I would like to offer us all here (in a form adapted for all Christians) in conclusion as an invitation to join in and make part of our way of living our faith:

The first commitment:

We, Christians from different churches, should always begin from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division in order to strengthen what is held in common even though the differences are more easily seen and experienced.

The second commitment:

We, Christians from different churches, must let ourselves continuously be transformed by the encounter with the other and by the mutual witness of faith.

The third commitment:

We, Christians from different churches, should again commit ourselves to seek visible unity, to elaborate together what this means in concrete steps, and to strive repeatedly toward this goal.

The fourth commitment:

We, Christians from different churches, should jointly rediscover the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ for our time.

The fifth commitment:

We, Christians from different churches, should witness together to the mercy of God in proclamation and service to the world.

Eva Guldanova, EFECW Co-President

Neighborhood Meeting

Stejeris, Mures, Romania 31st July – 6th August 2017

The Ecumenical Forum of Romanian Christian Women organised a neighbourhood meeting, attended by 25 women, representatives of 4 countries and 4 denominations: 10 participants from Moldova, 2 participants from Ukraine, 2 women from Hungary and 11 from Romania.

The objectives of the meeting were:

- to get to know the neighbors, and to strengthen the ecumenical relation with our neighbors;

- to share our experiences and learn from one another;

- the love for each other should not remain only on a verbal level but has to be factually presented;

- to help our sisters with ideas in building up the ecumenical network;

- to involve more young women in our network

- to be able to do our work in the future in a more effective way.

The following themes were discussed:

1. Self-awareness: "I on the way to myself ", and "I on the way to you".

2. How to motivate others to participate, to be active, and to promote the ecumenical network.

3. The role of women in different churches, what can they learn from each other and how to implement it in their churches.

During the meeting, participants were encouraged to become more self-confident, and aware of their true potential. Communication games made them realise how important it is to pay attention to the other with "the four ears" and to understand what the other would like to communicate: What does a person feel when people do not pay attention to her, or that we are not alone with our problems, and we could give to each other practical advice.

Motivation was another important aspect: participants thought about what motivates them in the women's work. They listed 11 types of motivation, the strongest being the love of God which urges women from different cultures or confessions to give themselves mutually spiritually though involving them in volunteer work

This type of meetings help to strenghthen the solidarity between women; participants can bring this knowledge/ these experiences back home in order to share and support other women, by organizing similar courses/meetings; they can help good communication between the different denominations and nations.

Zsuzsi Soos, EFECW CC member

Tips for women groups

Forum groups, parish groups, women assemblies or other Christian women groups

Do you remember? On page 8 in the last number of the EFECW news (September 2017) you could find a report on the Baltic Sea meeting and the participants' visit to the "women's Celebration Day" (500 years of Reformation)

In the afternoon of this day took place the "Women's Table Talk" – a meal for hundreds of women in front of the town hall of Wittenberg. It's a very nice possibility to do this with your own group at home. It could be a small group of 10 or 20 women or with more participants.

The idea of this meal lies in the past: during Luther's time it was usual to meet each other – students, their university teacher and other guests – and have a time of discourse after every dish. One of them has to prepare a theme, the other listened and then the discussion began.

So we encourage you to practice the same! You can choose a headline/topic. In Wittenberg it was called: "Bring along what you can: a cake, a word, a song…"

Here are the steps (proposal) – you need a preparatory team

- Greeting and message / music
- A starter (soup)
- A woman gives a kind of key-note speech
- Time for conversation and discussion
- A salade plate
- A second input (other aspect or another topic)
- Time for conversation and discussion
- A main dish (or finger food)
- Music and/or songs
- Another main course
- A third input/ music
- Dessert
- "Thank you" and "good bye"

Last not least: You do not have to say that the room is beautifully prepared with candles and flowers or something else. Enjoy your meal…

Marianne Milde CJ, EFECW CC member

Young women searching for identity

Stejeris, Romania

The Ecumenical Forum of Romanian Christian Women organised the "Young women searching for identity" project for the sixth time this year with the purpose of building and deepening reconciliation between the nations and denominations, and concentrating on the importance of intercultural and interreligious communication between Romanians, Hungarians and Roma, building self-esteem, focusing on the foundation which is Christ, giving the girls the opportunity to experience the power of Christian community even though they came from different backgrounds. The purpose of the project is also to involve more young women in the work of the Romanian Ecumenical Forum.

The course (project) took place in summer 2017, in Stejeris, led by different lectors from Romania. The course was attended by 30 young women- representatives of three denominations (Catholic, Reformed and Orthodox).

One of the women, who became a very active member of the Romanian Forum through this project stated: “My name is Eva Laposi, I am 23 years old, working at an IT company. This is the fifth time attending this seminar organised by the Romanian Ecumenical Christian Forum. Unfortunately, this time my job did not allow me to be on the course for the full time, but I travelled every day some hours after my work to participate at the seminar, because what I experienced during the last

seminars gave me so much strength and dynamic through the whole year that it really worth it for me. This year was also a very inspiring week for me, I met many new wonderful ladies, and when I go back I always feel like home. It is such a good feeling that though the lectures and activities we are so open to each other and we sometimes share thing that even with our best friends do not share. We always feel that the organisers are attentive to us and to our needs. They also help us to see who we really are and how God see us. We learnt to admit and to recognise that many things are not going well in our lives but we need to see in God the forgiving Father and if we do so we will be capable to accept and love ourselves. Another beautiful thing in this seminar is that after it is finished will not end because we have a group that is a community and it is like a big family. I am very grateful to God and to the FORUM that this camp was organized this year also. I can state in the name of many women that this seminar is a turning point in many women’s life, an encouragement, a blessing that will remain in our hearts forever.”

Zsuzsi Soos, EFECW CC member

Strengthening Ties

EFECW and CEC

In May 2015 the Conference of European Churches after its new restructuring issued a call to its member churches, national councils of churches and organizations in partnership for nominations of members to its Thematic Reference Groups (TRG). In June 2015 two of the EFECW CC members became part of two CEC TRGs – Fiona Buchanan (nominated through her church) of the TRG on Human Rights and Eva Guldanova of the TRG on Ecclesiology and Theological Dialogue among Churches. The issues these groups work with are part of our priority themes and participating in these groups is one of the ways of being a recognized voice of Christian women in Europe. We are glad that this way the Forum can participate in the work of the CEC and these contacts foster our cooperation.

After initial time of transition, since the CEC was looking for a new staff to coordinate the work of the TRG on Ecclesiology and Theological Dialogue, the group started its work and regular meetings in 2017. As a member of the group I am delighted that the CEC new coordinator of this work is a young skilled woman theologian from the Orthodox Church in Greece – Katerina Pekridou.

1st meeting, May 2017, Brussels, Belgium

In May 2017 the TRG on Ecclesiology and Theological Dialogue met for the first time. The group consists of 12 members, but only half of them was able to attend. Fr Heikki Huttunen, General Secretary of CEC, welcomed the group and stressed the need for theological reflection within CEC. The initial round gave a chance to the participants to introduce along with themselves also their churches and/or organizations they are representing. The participants shared current issues of concern as well as news and current projects of their sending bodies which gave us a nice picture of the context we all live in nowadays in Europe.

Subsequently we discussed hopes and expectations from the TRG on the side of our organizations and the CEC as well as on the personal level. The new CEC Dialogue Secretary Katerina Pekridou presented to the group an overview of the multiple theological work and engagement which is a legacy of the CEC for the work of the TRG.

Within the discussion the question was raised whether the work of CEC should be so EU-oriented given that its membership extends beyond the European Union.

The TRG also discussed the draft report on *Migration and Ecclesiology* which was the outcome of the Consultation organized by CEC in Denmark in December 2016. It was noted with disappointment that none of the TRG members was invited to the consultation despite the expectation after its announcement earlier in the year.

Expectations and topics for common exploration in the future within the TRG include:

- *dealing with acute challenges and relevant questions for Europe (such as ecumenical fellowship, secularization, ecumenical work on migration) and offering theological support and reasoning for its constituency*
- *strengthening relations between East and West, North and South, and dealing with the "new polarities", challenges of nationalism and extremism, exploring the question of identity and multiple identities*
- *engaging more views and perspectives, e.g. women's perspectives, and strengthening ties and connections*
- *collaboration of relevant institutions in Theological Education/Ecumenical Formation*
- *monitoring and facilitating the reception of Charta Œcumenica*
- *examining questions of ecclesiology and ethics, relationship of doctrine and ethics*
- *issues of minority and majority churches, healing of memories*
- *harvesting responses given by CEC Member Churches and related organizations to The Church: Towards a Common Vision document, putting them into dialogue*
- *to map out and give support to dialogues and interfaith initiatives between churches and church communions in Europe*
- *to facilitate creation and work of a network of European mission activities and studies*
- *help sharing of spirituality and worship life, between churches and at ecumenical meetings*

The group also discussed the proposals for workshops for the 2018 CEC General Assembly in Serbia. Out of 4 very good proposals it had to choose two which it will prepare. At the end the TRG discussed and came up with ideas for the seminar on *Reformation and the making of ecclesial identities*.

2nd meeting, October 2017, Brussels, Belgium

At its second regular meeting the group discussed the *Open Letter of CEC* with regard to the future of Europe. In context of this letter each representative prepared and presented their organization's vision of unity and what does this vision mean for Europe and us today. The second part of the discussion in response to the open letter revolved around questions: What does a joint Christian mission in Europe look like? What does it entail? Based on the contribution from the EFECW we discussed role of women in the churches and in society.

In the second part of the meeting the group planned the two workshops for the CEC General Assembly that will be organized by it. The first workshop will be about *Ecumenical fellowship of churches* and among other things will seek to create a vision for the TRG for the next period after the CEC GA, based on the needs and expectations from CEC member churches and associated organizations. We had a very good planning session and discussion in connection with this workshop that helped further clarify the role of the members of the group. The second workshop will be about *Interreligious work in the face of migration in Europe*. Again we planned the workshop and had a good discussion about the hot topics in Europe, but here several of us had to also admit that we do not feel to be experts or well versed and experienced in interreligious dialogue. For the workshops CEC is also looking for possible experts/advisors on the topics as well as people who could facilitate contacts to locally relevant persons. Since the Forum has an expert with a strong experience in interreligious work and encounter in Serbia in the CC member Marijana Ajzenkol, who will represent the Forum at the CEC GA and has many contacts to significant local representatives, I suggested her name. Marijana later agreed to join the workshop and help the organizers with it, especially with getting local contacts to people involved in interreligious work.

The TRG also briefly discussed proposals and ideas for Europe Conference of the International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS).

At the meeting I was struck and enriched by some enlightening thoughts of the members of the TRG, like these two from an Orthodox brother: 1) “differences are also providential opportunities not only a result of our sin against unity” – that is an invitation also for us in the Forum to value the differences and richness of approaches among us and make a good use of it for the benefit of all. 2) “Post-secular Europe will be more religious than ever before.” Question was also raised to which we all need/might find it helpful to seek answers: “What does it mean that we as churches (Christians) give hope to the society and to Europe?” I can see how this question connects with the theme of our GA: “Christian women speak out” – our voice certainly wants to be a voice bringing hope. And thus we are invited to reflect together upon this question.

During the discussion in the final round of sharing the CEC representative posed a question:

“What would the Forum recommend to CEC with regard to women’s work?” From my point of view the question is an indication of growing appreciation of our work and an expression of trust and desire to listen to our voices. It is an invitation for us to enter into a deeper conversation. The CC will collect ideas and present it through me to CEC.

Over-all the second meeting of the CEC TRG was again a very fruitful meeting where anew I had a chance to present some of the work and emphases of the Forum to ecumenically involved people in Europe which is very helpful for continuous raising awareness about our organization, our work and our issues. The next regular meeting of the TRG will take place in February 2018.

Eva Guldanova, EFECW Co-President

Translation. Transgression. Transformation.

Conference of the European Society of Women in Theological Research - ESWTR

23 - 26 August 2017, Vienna, Austria

Women in Europe have been and continue to be border crossers concerning religion. Voluntarily or involuntarily they leave their familiar environment and dare to venture into the unknown. These border crossings by female migrants (wanderers) are an impulse for movement and change of traditional thinking patterns and habits within the European societies and among religions. To "translate" something from one time and culture into another means to widen horizons and that contains undreamt potentials of hope. But "translation" is also risky: Borderlands can become a place for the experience of God as well as for the remoteness of God.

The ESWTR's congress questioned the inclusions and exclusions that are connected to the transformation processes in a religiously plural Europe. With its deliberately theological perspective it made a contribution to the public debate on migration in Europe.

Within the process it marked three borderlands, which are to be sounded out and explored through border crossings:

1.) Biblical border crossings: Translation as bridge building between the familiar and the foreign.
2.) Ethical border crossings: Migration as a borderline experience.
3.) Interreligious/interdenominational border crossings: Dialogue between the religions and denominations as impulse for change.

Out of the huge variety of lectures, mini-lectures and working groups I present two personal impressions:

The keynote lecture of Judith Gruber, a German scholar who had taught in the United States, was interesting for me because she gave a case study of the discussion around the short movie *Submission* made in 2004 by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a former Muslim born in Somalia who emigrated to the Netherlands and later to the United States. She published this film about the oppression of women

under Islamic law in cooperation with the filmmaker Theo van Gogh who was murdered later that year in Amsterdam by a Dutch Muslim man with Moroccan roots. The main question of the lecture was: can women in interreligious dialogue speak? This is on the background of the discourse usually and mainly dominated by men.It could seem as if *Submission* gives a voice to oppressed Muslim women, but in fact the woman is depicted only, stereotyped as a victim who needs to be saved. Implicitly Islam is shown as a bad religion oppressing women – unlike the attitude towards women in Christianity. This is a very postcolonial approach. This analysis does not take into account that in the secularised Netherlands Christianity has not so much importance or power any more, probably less than in the United States where Judith gave her classes. Nor does Judith pay attention to the fact that Ayaan Hirsi Ali is an African former Muslim woman and speaks as somebody who knows a certain Islam from inside. Perhaps the question of her lecture should have been different: can white Christian women speak for Muslim women? I remember the times in the seventies, eighties and nineties of the last century when I – together with other white christian women – critically analysed bible and church-history and accused the structures and tendencies which oppressed and silenced women. Only later the analysis became richer and showed that we were somewhat one-sided talking for the whole but not seeing the differences even between white women not all being heterosexual or middle class or …

Another example of transgressing borders was described in the lecture about transgenders by a the Dutch scholar Annemariecke van den Berg showing that – at least in the Netherlands – the attempts to include transgenders in speech and deeds in the church life are growing. A special network has been established recently. Annemariecke gave a very interesting bible study of the beardless men and connected surprising insights in biblical stories about transgressing gender borders to today's practice by elaborating on the example of Conchita Wurst, the male Austrian singer and winner of the Eurovision Song Contest 2014 who appeared as the bearded lady on the stage singing the winning song „Rise Like A Phoenix".

Martina Heinrichs (Netherlands) and Gabi Kienesberger (Austria)

Program, summaries and photos of the conference: http://eswtr2017.univie.ac.at

Women of the Way: Global Pioneers Gathering

Celebrating Constance Coltman, 14-16 September 2017, London, UK

Constance Todd was ordained on 17th September 1917, the first woman to be ordained into the ministry of Word and Sacraments in a mainline, IK church. Exactly 100 years later, the churches celebrated this first pioneer. Everyone was challenged to live out bravely the 'firsts' to which God calls us all.

She was the first woman to be ordained in a mainstream British denomination – and she continued her pioneering role by remaining active in ministry as a married woman and mother.

Her courage showed from the start in the sacrificial ministry she shared with her husband in London Docklands. A committed pacifist and suffragist, she was also an early supporter of birth control. With clear views on women's history and role in the Church, Constance Coltman did much to promote women's ordination across the churches, at home and abroad.

In September this year, I had a big opportunity to participate in a global gathering, entitled the *'Women of the Way'*: Global Pioneers Gathering – Celebrating Constance Coltman, in London, UK.

The global gathering, 14 – 16 September 2017, offered the opportunity to allow an open space for women from around the world to share stories and experiences of women in ministry and leadership, whilst acknowledging the barriers that have been crossed and the obstacles that women continue to face.

The aim of the global gathering was to celebrate the leadership and ministry of women around the world in light of this important centenary; to learn and grow together, and to create a legacy for the empowerment of women today.

The event was organised by the United Reformed Church and Congregational Federation, as part of the celebrations marking 100 years since the ordination of Constance Coltman, the first woman to be ordained into the ministry of the Congregational Union of England and Wales and of a mainstream British denomination. Constance was a pioneer of women's ministry and a subversive peacemaker, dedicating her life and ministry to pacifism during both World Wars and serving the most downtrodden in the East End of London.

From Thursday 14 September to Saturday 16 September 2017, *a Woman of the Way: Global Pioneers' Gathering* brought together delegates from around the world, all of whom are leaders in women's ministry. Meeting at Church House, we discussed many issues, including 'Celebrating

Women's Leadership', 'Catalysts for change: issued faced by women in the Church today', and 'Resistance and Protest'.

Two public events have been organised: a lecture at the Dr Williams Library, Gordon Square, Bloomsbury, London, on Saturday 16th September (1pm) and a special thanksgiving service on Sunday 17th September (3pm) at the American International Church, Tottenham Court Road, London. Led by the Revd Dr Susan Durber, at the service were present international guests from the wider family of the Council for World Mission.

Asea Railean, EFECW Co-President

37th Annual Conference

Fellowship of the Least Coin - International Committee ICFLC

Slovenia, October 13th – 20th, 2017

The venue Moravske Toplice in the beautiful North Eastern part of **Slovenia** made the ICFLC meeting of 2017 very special: hilly and full of vineyards, located in a spa of natural healthy warm water sources. Our host Corinna Harbig, outgoing president of the World Day of Prayer WDP and thus outgoing member of the ICFLC, had invited us to this marvellous place and gave us the opportunity to know more about it by a **pilgrimage to Jerusalem** and other excursions. Yes, there is a 'Jerusalem' in Slovenia given its name by cruisaders who on their way to the Holy Land came to this place in the 13h century. They prayed at a prayer tower, which was replaced by a church "Our lady of sorrows" in the 17th century. A rich landlord built it after the plague had stopped killing his people. This area was catholic, it belonged to the Habsburg empire. Over the river however everybody was protestant because the ruler had given freedom and tolerance of religion as long as one obeyes to the king. At the time the rule was: cuius regio, eius religio. Which means that normally the people had to take the same religion as their ruler.

in the vineyards

Jerusalem and the crusader's church

Our host Corinna introduced us to wonderful **women of the rather young Slovenian branch of WDP** as well as WDP members from neighbouring countries like Croatia and Serbia. One of them, Natascha, took us to the **Roma village Pusca** where she grew up. It is the largest Roma settlement in Slovenia. We were welcomed by her cousin who is the president of all Roma councils in Slovenia. Here they live between modernity and tradition. In the multifunctional hall there is a music school. They give additional classes for the children, offer playing activities to them and hold consultations about employment for the adults. They also develop cultural tourism: common activities like cooking or singing together. Before they were ashamed of being a Roma or Gipsy, now they are

proud of their own culture. Natascha explains us something about the history of Roma people in Slovenia. 1908 the first settlers came, and in 1912 land was sold to them. Before in the 17th century they have come from India. One part went to Russia, Siberia but it was too cold there. Another part went through Hungary to Germany. The Sinti are in the North of Lubljana and have German names. In Pusca – near the Hungarian border - there are many Hungarian names. After the Bosnian war in the nineties of the last century many Roma came to Slovenia where there was peace. Muslim Roma coming from Kosovo settled around Maribor. Among Roma groups there are differences concerning socialisation, the relation with the environment and the importance given to education. In Pusca education has a high priority. Here was the first Roma kindergarten in the world, founded in 1962. In the beginning only Roma children from the village were allowed, then it mixed with Slovenian children and other religions. They started to teach elementary things like how to wash yourself. After the parents showed acceptance they launched a Montessori programme and opened it up to everybody. So the minority can give something to the majority! In Slovenia there is a one year maternity leave, then follows the kindergarden time which is not obligatory. From the 6th year on children go to the elementary school. Unfortunately, at the age of 12, 13 Roma children start to drop out; especially girls due to early pregnancies. This is a step back. Usually the youth goes to vocational schools, but some also to university and this number is growing. Unfortunately, the old Roman skills like music have been nearly got lost. In former times they earned their living as musicians, by predicting the future, by sharpening knives. As to religion: since a long time Roma have been catholic adapting to the religion of their surroundings which also protected them from prosecution. And Roma have their own Mary, also in their homes and gardens. Every year they go on pilgrimage (Lourdes/France or Medugorie/Bosnia and Herzegovina), also the younger generation. There are also protestant and adventist Roma because of missionaries who brought these confessions here.

in the Roma village

And – just some days before the end of the Jubilee Year of 500 years after the Reformation - we met with Slovenian World Day of Prayer women in Murska Sobota and the first Slovenian female pastor Reverend Simona Prosic, responsible for women's work. We were invited to **"Catherina's table"** which emphasises the importance of women during the Reformation. Usually we hear only about important men. At this occasion we were supprised by a play which showed Katharina von Bora, Luther's wife, being interviewed by two young women about her life as a strong woman at the side of Martin Luther. And we learned a lot from the interactive Bible study "Come everything is ready" on Luke 14,15-24 about hospitality and what it means to the rich or to the poor, guided by Ulrike Bechmann, who works at the nearby Austrian university of Graz after she had served the German WDP for a long period. "Come everything is ready" will be the theme of the World Day of Prayer in March 2019 prepared by Slovenia.

at the Lutheran church

Cora at the 9th EFECW General Assembly

Another highlight of the stay in Slovenia was the change in leadership and the election of the new **ICFLC Executive Secretary** Liza Lamis at the annual ICFLC meeting. She will follow up Corazon Tabbing-Reyes in January 2018. Cora will retire after 18 years of devoted work for the movement, first as a representative of Asian women and the last ten years as our Executive Secretary. With great thanks and a farewell evening full of good memories and humor we showed our gratitude and said good-bye to Cora.

And we welcomed Liza who will take over next year. She holds several degrees, one of them in feminist theology which she studied in the US. She is experienced in working with Christian women in the Philippines, and served also in other Asian countries like Thailand and Indonesia. She was a teacher in theological schools and served in her own Baptist church. *"I'm fascinated at how women transform their own lives, the lives of others and the community in the end, through works of solidarity and sisterhood that defy boundaries."* We feel very proud that she will be our next Executive Secretary and are looking forward to work with her in the years to come.

Thanks to the prayers and least coins of many women throughout the world the ICFLC could again accept more than thirty project applications and some scholarships for young women. As donations had unfortunately gone down during the last year, we had to be prudent and could not always give the full amount which was asked by the applicants. Hopefully this will change for the better in the near future.

Martina Heinrichs, ICFLC Chair 2016 – 2018 and Europe regional co-odinator,
EFECW-consultant Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women
Most of the photos were taken by Tanja Povsnar, president WDP Slovenia.

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