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

EFECW News

September 2017

Because the Lord is my Shepherd, I have everything I need!
Thank You that you are helping us to hear your gentle voice.
Thank You for helping our sisters all over the world
to be able to follow you to the quiet streams.
Lord, you say your ways are ways of pleasantness
and all your paths are peace.
Thank you for guiding daughters of yours to a new level of peace.
Help us, your daughters, to find and follow your peace.
Show us how to muffle all the noise around us and rest in your arms.

EFECW Coordinating Committee meeting
Crêt-Bérard, Switzerland, 27-30 April 2017

From 27th to 30th April 2017 the coordinating committee (CC) of EFECW met in Switzerland. The Protestant retreat centre Crêt-Bérard is situated at a hill high above the *Lac Léman or Lake Geneva.*

The Protestant centre was constructed in a Romanesque style, conferring it a unique character. Its marvellous garden opens on to a vast panoramic view of beautiful mountains. We could enjoy the beauty of the region and of the seasons from snowfall end of April to sunny hours at the terraces. All in all, it was a unique place for our CC meeting and perfect for the combination of CC and Neighbourhood Meeting. We are grateful to the Swiss team for all the preparation work they did to provide us a perfect meeting space!

The CC meeting was on purpose fixed on the same date and place as the French speaking neighbourhood meeting to get into deeper contact with national fora members and to participate also partly in the programme under the theme of Migration "From Tolerance to Welcome" (read details in the report of the neighbourhood meeting).

Unfortunately, our treasurer Hannah Golda was unable to be with us due to a broken arm, but as usual, she had prepared all financial documents in due time, so the CC could take all necessary decisions on financial issues.

We were working successfully on the programme of the General Assembly in Serbia, 2018. Meanwhile some CC members had visited the conference site, the Monastery of Soko, and had met with local women. Soon the letter of invitation with many details will be sent to our members.

For the next CC meeting in September in Edinburgh we fixed the launch of the Pop up monastery film "Gardens of Eve". We are delighted to announce that the film 'Gardens of Eve' has now officially been released. The film is a project of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women, and was funded by the Methodist Church in Britain. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those women involved in the production of the film for their time, talents and honesty. And so, the CC meeting in Edinburgh again will be a chance to get connected with local women and to promote the idea of the Forum.

Francophone Neighborhood Meeting
Crêt-Bérard, Switzerland, 28-30 April 2017

Migration - "From Tolerance to Welcome"

The choice of the theme "Migration" intended, first of all, to stimulate discussion, sharpen our outlook on the reality of the migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Switzerland; but it also permitted comparisons with the situation in other European countries.

Confronting "tolerance" with "welcome" underlines the fact that the first has become almost synonymous to "indifference" and has a decidedly passive connotation. "Welcome" on the contrary refers to a "welcoming culture" that is active and is sensitive. Are our European societies rising to the challenge?

24 women representing the fora of France, Greece, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland and the EFECW Coordinating Committee (meeting around the same dates) met together, in order to gather information on the situation of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers as well as men and women without legal status (so-called “Sans Papiers”).

The speakers were Diane Barraud (Point d’Appui) and Myriam Schwab (Protestant Social Centre), both working in Lausanne, presented the situation in Switzerland. Contrary to what some political campaigns and “fake news” want to make us believe, immigration into Europe is minimal compared to international migration e.g. in Africa. Due to initiatives of the popular right-wing party UDC in Switzerland, laws concerning migration and the right to asylum have become more and more restrictive.

Moreover, the Dublin accords implemented in 2005 aggravate the problem by stipulating that asylum seekers may only present their request in one state. This means that many countries including Switzerland send back asylum seekers already registered elsewhere, even though everyone knows that countries like Italy, Greece, and Spain are already overwhelmed by the enormous number of migrants arriving via the Mediterranean Sea. The Dublin Accords also are meant to avoid “asylum shopping”! Switzerland is thus seen as the country of the “last chance” in Europe.

Nevertheless, the Swiss federal government, as well as the individual cantons, offer considerable financial means subsidizing non-governmental organizations promoting integration of migrants. Moreover, a large number of private individuals are also actively engaged in working with migrants.

In the second plenary session, Laetitia Carreras presented the commitment of the CCSI (Contact Centre Switzerland-Immigrants, Geneva) working in the realm of undocumented workers ("Sans Papiers"). In Switzerland, the number of such persons living without legal status is estimated between 76,000 to 300,000, among them at least 40,000 women working in the domestic sector, a sector that is at the heart of the efforts to offer means of legalization, especially in urban centers like Geneva or Zurich. Political lobbying towards this goal has been an important aspect from the beginning. In particular, women in important political positions have promoted an inclusive interpretation of the Swiss constitution; they have been active in changing laws; they have highlighted problems and concerns of the "clandestine population", in particular the access of all children to public schools regardless of their legal status in the country. A group is working on the project of a "Better protection of persons lacking legal status who are victims of sexual or conjugal abuse or who suffer from violence in their families." The campaign called "No domestic worker is illegal" was very efficient. The operation "Papyrus", introduced recently in Geneva, is a first effort to legalize "Sans Papiers" having already lived in here for several years. A "Papyrus" group has also been created in Zurich. The CCSI offers help in gathering the necessary documents to people wishing to start the process of legalization, stepping out of the shadows of the clandestine existence. The Project Papyrus articulates the demands and aims at its implementation on the national level. Unfortunately, another problem is the lack of recognition all foreigners in Switzerland experience concerning official recognition of their diplomas, professional titles and experience acquired elsewhere.

Catherine Pfaehler, secretary of the NGO "Christian Peace Service" (Christlicher Friedensdienst) presented their project "Professional Mentoring of Migrant Women" created specifically, in order to overcome this obstacle. This program assists professional migrant women from non-European countries whose diplomas are not recognized in Switzerland. The program consists of 10 months of workshops dealing with different aspects involved in finding suitable employment. During this period, the migrant women are accompanied by Swiss professional women who explain local customs, laws and regulations to them. The results are positive: A third of the migrant women find employment in their professional fields, while a fourth find work as interns or enroll in continued education.

Greece presented a film on the situation in the country. Migration represents a particular problem to the small islands in the Aegean Sea where the new arrivals quickly outnumber the local population. Moreover, some NGOs of doubtful reputation seem to make exaggerated promises to asylum seekers. In spite of being confronted with enormous problems, the Greek people in general

continue to offer their traditional hospitality.

Finally, an important part of the meeting were the exchanges about the national fora represented at the meeting.

Ecumenical Celebration: Evelyn Zinsstag and Marianne Creusaz, protestant pastors, prepared the Sunday morning service on Ruth 1,1-19 and 4,9-17.

An excursion took us to Chaplin's World a new museum near Vevey, on the Lake of Geneva. The experience of a well-known migrant shown in his place of residence during the last decades of his life. The weather was splendid and everyone seemed to enjoy the outing.

Report written by Catherine Gyarmathy and Roswitha Golder

Getting to know the EFECW

at the Neighbourhood Meeting in Crêt-Bérard, Switzerland, 28-30 April 2017

The weekend in Crêt-Bérard took place in perfect "April weather", as we call it (in Serbia, it's "March weather", says CC member Marijana Ajzenkol) – snow on arrival and two warm, sunny days after that. During the neighbourhood meeting which was attended by members of the French, Swiss, Greek, Spanish and Italian forums, we had the chance to meet the CC members who held their meeting in the same place as us. They joined us on several occasions and widened the range of countries present at the meeting.

The topic of migration was hotly discussed from various perspectives: Beside the presentation of three organisations that work with immigrants in Switzerland, we learned about the situation in the countries of the member forums. The Dublin system was criticised from all participants – be it from the Greek side, where the struggle with the uncontrolled influx of refugees and the precarious conditions in the camps continues, or the Dutch side, where refugee accommodations are being closed down because they remain empty. Between these two extremes, the situation differs in each country. The passionate discussions showed the involvement of many participants in migrant work in their respective contexts. The program was well rounded with a visit to the Charles Chaplin Museum over in Corsier.

The average age in the CC is a lot lower than in the French and Swiss forums, who both struggle to

find young members. I do hope that a renewal will come for both and am happy to join the Swiss forum. However, I think it will be important for the current members to invite young women based on personal contacts and friendships. It's much easier to follow a friend into an organisation, especially when a generation gap needs to be bridged.

I'd first read about the EFECW in 2016, while researching Ruth Epting's biography for my master thesis. Not long after that, Eva-Maria Fontana and Esther Janine Zehntner invited me to prepare the ecumenical Sunday worship of the upcoming neighbourhood meeting in Crêt-Bérard. During a meeting with Marianne Crausaz, my Catholic counterpart, Eva-Maria introduced us to the history of the Forum and the topic of the upcoming meeting. Migration stories aren't hard to find in the Bible. Despite our little experience in ecumenical worship, Marianne and me, enjoyed building a liturgy together. The Sunday worship turned out beautifully, with an African musician invited by Marianne and a sharing of bread as a sign of communion.

By Evelyne Zinsstag

Baltic neighbourhood meeting
9-14 August 2017, Magdeburg and Wittenberg, Germany

Reformation today: Women's Stories – Women's Vision

26 women from 9 countries and six different churches came together and brought along for the first step of this meeting their own unique story of a woman who has inspired their life. Sharing started in the small working groups in Russian, English or German. They shared pictures and biographies of well-known women like Madame Curie, or important women of participants' own church like Ortrud Rhein (German-speaking Romanian Lutheran Church) or of their own grandmother, mother or daughter. This sharing was very touching.

Waltraud Kämper, team member, organised an exposition with all these materials and we celebrated a nice vernissage.

The second session was a morning bible- study (Mk 16, 1 ff) with Dr. Anne Rademacher, catholic theologian.
Followed by the third session, "women's vision for today", where Sr. Marianne Milde CJ gave a short overview of EFECW history and an overview, illustrated by some quotations:

“Do not be afraid – remember the future”, 4th EFECW General Assembly, 1994, Budapest
"To be able to look forward to a living future, we need the memory of our roots and our beginnings.” (Elisabeth Raiser)

“Justice and peace, reconciliation and responsibility for creation were the main themes. With the spiritual riches of all the participating denominations, supported by feminist approaches to theology, Forum women have debated these subjects, prayed about them, and encouraged each other to take responsible action.” (Ruth Epting)

In the discussion-groups, that followed, there was a big willingness to discuss and think about problems in their countries and churches. It is normal that no concrete solutions can be agreed at this level but the discussion provoked willingness and readiness to continue developing appropriate answers/solutions back “home”.

The next day an important event took place: all participants joined the “Women’s Celebration Day” in Wittenberg (500 years of Reformation).

At 15.30 started the women’s meal with some hundred women sharing food on a big open place in front of the town hall. During the meal music was playing and different women gave talks about nourishment of the body, soul and spirit.

A beautiful atmosphere was created in the square. At the end of the day, we all went to the Lutheran church to attend the service that a group of women had prepared. The main theme was ‘Mary stands up’. A painting was specially chosen for this service and was hidden under 7 veils. These were lifted one at a time, by 7 descriptions of Mary, mother of Jesus.

Our group was invited to contribute with a song. Eva from the Lutheran church in Poland was very happy: “oh, it is great to play the piano in this church, where the reformation started…”The Baltic Sea meeting ended the day after and all went home with a lot of nice experiences but also new ideas for further reflection/action.

A big “thank you” to the German team: Waltraud Liekefett, Waltraud Kemper, Mechthild Boecher, Renate Lehmann, Ute Kiersch, Johanna Friedlein.

Fotos and Text: Marianne Milde CJ

Lutheranism in Bohemia and in Slovakia
5-8 May 2017, Prague, Czech Republic

From 5th to 8th May 2017, an international ecumenical meeting of Christian women from the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic was held to commemorate this year´s anniversary of Martin Luther. The meeting, which was open to the public, counted almost sixty participants and visitors.

The number of visitors to the concert, which was part of the meeting, was even higher. Saturday the 6th May was the day of lectures, presentations and discussion. There were two interesting lectures concerning Reformation, from which we, among other things, learned how women could

benefit from the Reformation. A few presentations of different projects of the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women and a book on Martin Luther. After Sunday worship and lunch, the participants went for a tour of Lutheran Prague. The evening was devoted to a concert of compositions which dated back to Luther´s time. The interpreters, a singer and an organist, both women, were foremost

Czech musicians. The concert took place in the beautiful gothic church of St. Wenceslas in Prague Na Zderaze, the lectures and presentations were held in the sacristy of that church. The foreign participants were accommodated in the homes of organizing women, which added special atmosphere to the meeting. Most of the participants and visitors were women. Among lecturers there was only one man, a friend of the Forum.

We are grateful to the Jacqueline Stuyt Legacy Fund, administered by the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women for the financial contribution.

Again, we persuaded ourselves that, at present, we rather look for something that connects us than what divides us. Therefore, though belonging to different denominations, we are happy to meet in our common prayer. As the Pope Francis said earlier this year: "We cannot change the past, but we may carry out the purification of our memory, to distinguish, and accept what was positive and well-founded in the Reformation, and to dissociate ourselves from the mistakes, exaggerations and failures through admitting the sins that led to splitting."

By Marketa Koronthalyova

"Homemade healing products from Lord's pharmacy"

EFCW Croatia and OSVRT (Osijek's urban garden association)

As a natural continuation of our earlier started topic about healthy food this year 2017, we prepared a workshop-seminar about domestically preparation of herbal products and learning how to use them.

The participants were sisters from Croatia (Osijek and Zagreb) and our guest sisters from Serbia (branches from Zemun and Novi Sad), whereas the activities were held in the premises of the parish of the Evangelical church in Osijek.

During the daily workshops, we became familiar with several ways for preparing and the purpose of using ointments such as Comfrey and Calendula, Lavender and Aloa Vera tincture, as well as a healing preparation made of honey and rooftops.

We learned the best time for plucking and collecting, the best way of drying herbs, as well as how long and where to store the various preparations.

There is also a terminology connected with the named activities so that we now know the difference between decoction, infusion, syrup, tincture and spread.

However, as caution and obligatory alergy tests are necessary before using any new medical preparation; the same referes to herbal products.

“The Lord let remedy grow out of the ground and a wise man doesn't resent it.” (Sirach 38,4)

“…for every sickness, there is a herb growing.” (Dr. Kneipp)

“...finding a way to heal with herbs and taking responsibility for one's health rises human dignity to the level that an ill man is almost half-way towards recovery.” (Maria Treben)

Assembled by: Branka Lacković
translation: Ana Slačanac

EFECW at the 61st Session of UN Commission on the Status of Women March 2017, New York, USA

In March 2017, I attended the 61st Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York as a delegate of the World Council of Churches, representing the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women. The commission exists to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, and meets every year to consult with Non-Governmental Organisations, UN entities, and UN member states. As a delegate from a faith-based organisation, I was hosted by Ecumenical Women, an organisation founded in 2000 to enhance and reinforce the collaboration of progressive churches and ecumenical organizations to advocate for the rights of women at the CSW.

The theme this year was 'Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work'. I attended the launch of the Global Equal Pay Platform of Champions, where we found that globally women earn 24% less than men. This will only be changed if we address cultural norms and mind-sets that see women as secondary citizens – at this rate it will take 118 years to close the gender pay gap, which I'm sure you'll agree is 118 years too long. We also heard how sexual and reproductive rights are critical for women's economic empowerment – if you don't have control over your body then you don't have control over your ability and decision to work. The impact of parallel legal systems was highlighted, demonstrating that at state level we might have women's token inclusion but the reality can still very much be patriarchal societies where women are subject to local level 'religious' laws, defined by male faith leaders. This impacts extensively on the ability of women to assert and claim their human rights.

A particular highlight was taking part in the programme of Ecumenical Women; this included daily worship and a chance to meet with women from a range of countries, communities and backgrounds. We held a public witness event at the Church Centre of the UN, which sought to

demonstrate that there is no time in recent history more urgent than now, particularly for faith communities and justice-seeking organizations, to continue their longstanding collaborative advocacy to end gender-based violence worldwide.

I was also delighted to highlight the activities of the Scottish chapter of Side by Side, the faith movement for gender justice, at their launch in New York. Through my role at Christian Aid I've been working with young people on faith responses to gender justice, and in Scotland we've been working to support churches to respond effectively to gender based violence. EFECW is now a member of Side by Side; the CSW reminds us of the support we have through our European and global partnerships and friendships as we work for gender justice.

It's easy to become filled with a sense of hopelessness when faced with the reality that women's human rights are being eroded under the name of religion, culture, tradition and nationalism. However the passion and energy of the hundreds of women and men I met in New York who are committed to advocacy for gender equality, to creating a world where women and men are equal, and where faith communities can contribute to a flourishing world where all rights are respected, reminds us of the value and impact of this literally life changing work.

As one of the wise women I met summed up:

'There's no place for hopelessness in our lives – it will only bring us down not up! We need to look at the positive deviants and find out why these exist. Form networks of women you can turn to and take turns to support each other - and lift each other up!'

By Fiona Buchanan, member of EFECW Coordinating Committee

News from EFECW partner organisations

"Do you care?" Yes, we care!
Inspiration through Dutch Ecumenical Women's Synods as alive as ever!

In the weekend of 25th and 26th of March 2017 the 10th Ecumenical Women's Synod was held under the title "Do you care?" in Delft/Netherlands. A hundred and fifty women were present on Saturday and more than hundred women participated on Sunday, among them quite some younger women and black women. This is a big group, and we can hopefully say that the idea of the Women's Synods is still alive 30 years after the first one which was held in 1987.

The keynote speeches were given by:

Janneke Stegeman, 37, who has been elected as theologian of the year 2016/2017, the first female one! Her lecture was about women's bodies and sexist reactions on the internet when a woman speaks out clearly. What happens when women – even those of the younger generations – give up the basic attitude of obedience and caring? Still the stereotypes of dominant men and serving women are valid, even today. Resistance and liberation is needed.

The second keynote speech was held by the Muslim theologian Nora Asrami, 34, a researcher and activist. She spoke about the danger to lose courage vis-à-vis political right wing tendencies and increasing polarisation in Europe. But there is also hope, coming from young muslims, who reconsider their religious identity in a peaceful way. There are several forms of Islam in the Netherlands, most are traditional but some also very moderate. In this diversity dialogue and encounter are more important than ever. Emancipation and empowerment of young people, and especially women, is strongly needed, the best remedy against the danger of radicalisation.

Marleen Stelling, 26, journalist, theologian and TV programme director gave the third and last keynote speech. She talked about "Care for yourself" and the demands of our modern societies towards women's bodies, that should be perfect. In addition to the role model of a perfect lover, partner and mother, as well as being successful in our job, doing sports and maintaining social networks, contacts and relationships – big pressure is laid on us by others, but often also by ourselves, as we think we have to fulfill all those expectations. Whereas older generations of women were educated to think mostly about other/s and not about themselves, younger women feel very strongly the normative modern images of a perfect woman, which they must respond to if they want to belong to their peer group and be visible in society.

In a big variety of workshops more items were tackled:

- informal care for another, e.g. an ill family member or partner firstly needs to care for yourself. How to do that?
- care for our feminist heritage by honouring the memory of the Dutch feminist theologian Catharina Halkes who died in 2011. How can we develop her ideas for future generations in the ecumenical women's movement?
- care for men and women with dementia. How do our churches handle this?
- care for our gender identity: transgenders as part of the body of Christ.
- care for yourself: silence and creativity – the film of EFECW Pop Up Monastery was presented.
- care for refugees and women without documents, presentation of several projects.

And creative workshops like painting, singing or taking a rest in the red meditation tent.

And at the synod table burning issues and policy items of the ecumenical women's movement came to the agenda. 13 issues had been handed in beforehand, which in total 60 women discussed during the two synod days:

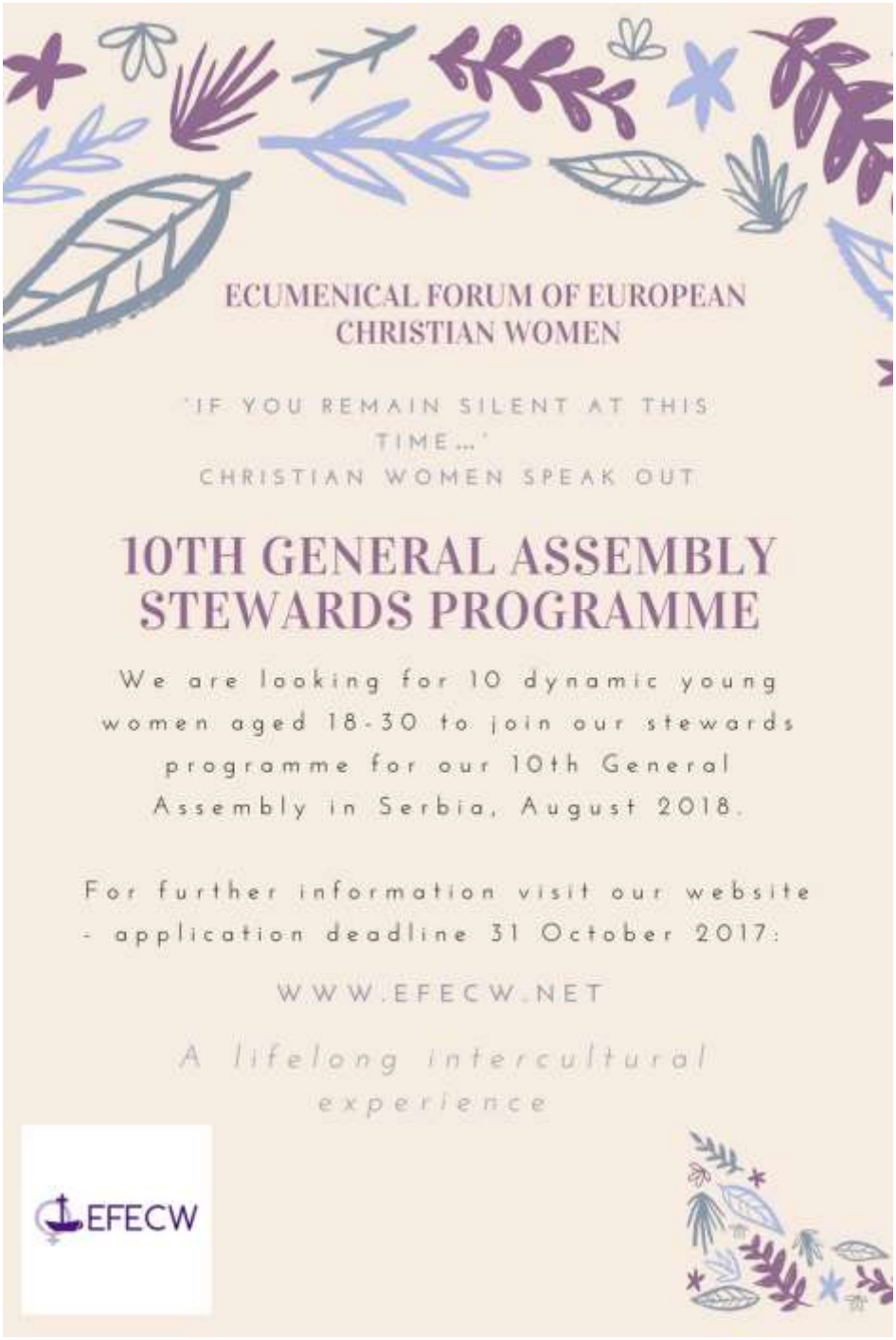
international level: about Yezidi women, about the situation of Palestinian women in Palestine/Israel, and about a Russian law on domestic violence.

In the Netherlands: the attention was drawn to poverty of women and children, more black people on TV, security in hospitals.

Church life: more space for Mother Earth in our (church) liturgies, space also for LGTB people in churches, and for refugees. More awareness-raising about ecology and care for Mother Earth, keep the fire for inter-religious dialogue/trialogue.

The board of the Dutch Ecumenical Women's Synod will consider these items. How can we work on them? Which actions need to be initiated? Who should do that and whom should we address? A working and action plan will follow.

By Martina Heinrichs, Netherlands, May 2017



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