EFECW News

January 2016

Happy New Year full of blessings!

Beatitudes

Blessed are those who speak out for the impoverished and those who suffer.

Blessed are those, who share, whatever they have:
Culture, Home, Work, Joy, Health and Food.

Blessed are those, who advocate to ensuring that the planet and its wealth of resources are the responsibility of all humanity.

Blessed are those, who know that BEING is more important than POSSESSING.

Blessed are those, who always believe in God AND humanity,
and therefore always retain a sense of calm.

Blessed are all of you, who are motivated to pursue peace and social justice!

With you God's Kingdom will come true – and Heaven will grow!

Prayer of the COPPAS in Pasto, Colombia

EFECW Coordinating Committee Meeting

Svätý Jur, Slovakia, 15-18 October 2015

The EFECW Coordinating Committee met at the "Agape" Centre, in Svätý Jur, near Bratislava, in Slovakia, hosted by Eva Guldanova one of the co-Presidents and the Slovak EFECW members. A meeting with the Secretary General of the Ecumenical Council of Churches and women of the Slovak Forum was organised in Bratislava during their stay.

From left to right (front) Marianne Milde CJ, Hannah Golda, Asea Railean
(back) Eva Guldanova, Fiona Buchanan, Gabriele Kienesberger, Marijana Ajzenkol

The CC developed a full programme of activities till the end of their mandate, having analysed and interpreted the decisions of the last General Assembly.

A lot of emphasis is given to strengthening the network of EFECW, at all levels, by: (a) Each CC member being responsible of a certain number of countries and ensuring continuous communication; (b) CC members attending national and/or regional/neighbourhood meetings; (c) creating a European database for EFECW with resources, expertise and know-how of the member-organisations through questionnaires; (d) encourage in all European EFECW events knowledge-sharing and exchange of experience to strengthen and renew membership. Another priority working-area is the importance and presence of EFECW in the European Church and NGO setting, in bringing a Christian ecumenical women's perspective either through representation and participation in relevant European structures and events or through public statements and positions.

Invitation to the National Coordinators' Meeting

29th June-3rd July 2016, Larnaca, Cyprus

"… Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5,24)
How can justice, cultural diversity and sensitivity go hand in hand?

Thanks to the hospitality of the members of the Cypriot Forum
we are pleased to invite you to the EFECW National Coordinators meeting in Larnaca.
The Forum of Cyprus has been an EFECW member since the General Assembly in Loccum, Germany 2010.
Its members have participated in EFECW meetings and, in spite of the critical economic situation
in their country, they are willing and ready to host the next NC meeting.

In the light of the 20th Anniversary of the Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998) the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women is starting a reflection process on the achievements in our churches. But it is necessary to also focus on the discriminatory structures and practices in churches and society today.

Now, almost 20 years later, we still have to admit that it is hard work to achieve an inclusive Christian society, according to the message of Jesus Christ. We have to be honest: this is not an option but the mission of the Gospel.

Registration to NC meeting in Cyprus is available on EFECW website.

Deadline for registrations: **28th February 2016**

Annual Conference of IKETH

16 – 19 April, 2015, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Haus Berlin, Germany

"Learn to live together – not against each other!"

Between 16th and 19th April 2015, in Berlin, the Interreligious Conference of Women Theologians (IKETH) took place. Three members of EFECW CC, Eva Guldanova, Marijana Ajzenkol, Asea Railean, attended the conference.

During the conference we learned to live together and not against each other. "Living together" is a lifelong learning process as cultural concepts and religious expressions are fluid and multilayered, responding to social, economic and political developments and change.

The president of the Interreligious Think-Tank, Amira Hafner-Al Jabaji emphasized that learning happens at various levels and its most important goal may be to create trust between the members of the learning community. Liturgy professor Brigitte Enzner-Probst pleaded to continue developing a "hermeneutics of everyday life", that would reflect experiences at the borders of religious institutions. Kantor Jalda Rebling, spiritual leader of the Ohel Hachidusch community (Berlin) invited to (re)discover common spiritual spaces such as music and liturgical singing, but also proposed to explore new ones: How about an interreligious garden of Abraham?

"Convivencia" is essentially about sharing and shaping everyday life, traditionally the domain of women; but characterized by a low theory level.

A special feature of the conference: the inputs of EFECW participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Slovakia and Moldova. We spoke about the interreligious situation in our native and respective countries, demonstrating that interreligious issues have a long tradition in Europe, spanning from the flourishing encounter of cultures in Al-Andalus to the relentless persecution and murder of Jewish communities in many parts of Europe.

We, as the conference participants, visited the Memorial church in Plötzensee which features the images of Alfred Hrdlicka's "Dance of Death" co-memorating the thousands of persons resisting the Hitler regime who were executed in the nearby execution prison Plötzensee. Pastor Michael Maillard also spoke about the engagement of the parish in a neighborhood where many migrants live and work. We visited the Turkish Sehitlik mosque and its newly-opened cultural centre. We participated in the Sabbath evening-service in the Oranienburgerstrasse synagogue, where we were welcomed by Rabbi Gesa Ederberg.

The conference closed with a Sunday service at Marienkirche, one of the oldest churches in Berlin, and then meeting with Pastor Haussmann and a team from the "House of One", an important initiative of Christian, Jewish and Muslim persons and institutions. Their aim is to create a room for worship where the three religions can be under one roof. They would worship in their separate spaces, a synagogue, a mosque and a church, but would share a central space, which would be filled together.

by Asea Railean

International Meeting of Women in Prague, 27th-31st May 2015

"Twenty five years after the changes in central Europe: what did we gain and what did we lose?"

The international meeting of women took place in a capuchin monastery in Prague with 36 participants from Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary and Romania.

The programme started with visits to important landmarks and places in Prague and its historical centre, and was followed by thematic reflections in three blocks: (a) Prof. Jan Sokol made a presentation on Society and Economics. (b) Josef Špak (former patriarch of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church) held a lecture on Church and Ecumenism. (c) Ing. Bohuslava Boučková (Union of Catholic Women) concluded the reflections, speaking on the topic „Woman and Family". All three lectures were followed by discussions and sharing experiences. Also, every day of the conference started and ended with common ecumenical worship, each time prepared by sisters from one of the participating countries.

Participants participated also in two special events:

a. On Friday the 29th May night participants were able to visit the churches in the vicinity of the Capuchin Monastery with a special programme prepared by individual parishes for the Night of Churches 2015.
b. At 8 p. m. on 30th May, a concert took place in the refectory of the monastery. The ensemble Trio Cantabile played compositions inspired by great women characters of the Bible, composers being G. P. Telemann, G. F. Händel, A. Vivaldi and others.

Results of the project: The initiative of the International Meeting of Women came from Germany and the aim was to extend and strengthen contacts with Czech women in order to overcome stereotypes and prejudices from the past. During excursions, the participants of the meeting got acquainted with the history and the current atmosphere of Prague and they came to the conclusion that for them it was an enrichment due to new information and wonderful impressions. During common talks, prayers, evening sessions, lectures and discussions the participants realized how intensively the history of the nations of Central Europe pervades and how similar historical experience pulls these nations together. The women who were the witnesses to the World War II and the time after that war brought in precious memories of the events that led to the division of the nations of Central Europe. In the past 25 years the economic and social differences between the countries of Central Europe have been leveled. All the participants agreed on the fact that personal contacts and meetings is the way leading to overcoming the barriers that still remain between us, to mutual understanding, tolerance, and building confidence.

by Nadeje Mandysova (text from longer report)

Organising a European Christian Convention on the model of German Kirchentag

Members of various European Christian movements and churches, met in the Protestant Academy in Bad Boll (Germany) from 1 to 3 June 2015 to start the preparatory process for a European Christian "Convention". EFECW was represented by Asea Railean and Zsuzsi Soos. The CC has decided at its last meeting to follow-up closely with the preparation of this event but not to be represented in the provisional Coordination Team yet.

Roadmap to a European Christian "Convention"

We acknowledge our responsibility to create a future with hope for the whole of Europe and for the world. We stand up for peace, freedom and well-being, compassion and solidarity. At this time of crises we want to contribute to European unity and Europe's responsibility in the world. Inspired by our Christian faith we want to strengthen the fabric of European society.

The Christian vision for peace, freedom and justice gave impetus to the European project. Today, peace and freedom in Europe are threatened by an increasing number of conflicts. Inequality is growing. More and more people are facing poverty and social exclusion. Countless people have died because of the walling-up of Europe's external frontiers leading to new borders within Europe and with its neighbors.

Photo : http://www.sven-giegold.de/2015/european-christian-convention-is-on-its-way/

We want to live up to the Ecumenical commitment of the churches in Europe for unity.

"We are convinced that the spiritual heritage of Christianity constitutes an empowering source of inspiration and enrichment for Europe. On the basis of our Christian faith, we work towards a humane, socially conscious Europe, in which human rights and the basic values of peace, justice, freedom, tolerance, participation and solidarity prevail." (Charta Oecumenica, 2001)

Therefore we want to initiate a process towards a European Christian Convention …

… as a participatory large-scale gathering A Christian event - fully ecumenical - open to everyone – bringing together people from all over Europe and beyond!

… as the culmination of a journey We want to create a movement in which events and meetings in Europe are steps on the way: crossing borders in the form of a pilgrimage, a peace train – starting small and growing fast. We hope this will be first of a series of such gatherings.

… as a place to share our spirituality Sharing the Bible, praying and singing are at the heart of our spirituality and thus central to our "Convention". We want to share with each other our spiritual journeys and our experiences. The European Christian „Convention" is part of a pilgrimage contributing to the transformation of our world.

… as a festival of creativity With music, theatre, arts as well as the richness of cultural life in our churches and movements, including open space for youth culture.

… as a place of dialogue Between our Christian traditions and with the people of the different faiths and worldviews that make up Europe.

… as a place to address burning issues There is space for large debates and small workshops, for exhibitions and initiatives. We want to bring in a positive vision for Europe from a Christian perspective and to contribute to the building of European society. We want to tackle the challenges Europe is facing. We want to strengthen European values. We want to contribute to a "Soul for Europe".

Process: The meeting in Bad Boll has set up a provisional Coordination Team to prepare the next steps in the process. This team will prepare the organizational structures. Another meeting in 2016 will provide the space for organizations and churches to start the process leading on to a possible "Convention" at the beginning of the next decade. An independent and interactive Blog could provide a platform for further dialogue.
Members of the provisional Coordination Team: Peter Annegarn (Brussels), Jeannette Behringer (Zürich), Laura Casorio (Paris), Annika Foltin (Lancaster), Sven Giegold (Düsseldorf/Brussels), Geoffrey Johnston (London), Victoria Johnston (Lille), Eszter Kalit (Cluj), Katerina Karkala-Zorba (Crete), Jari Kupiainen (Helsinki), Silke Lechner (Fulda), Rüdiger Noll (Berlin)
Secretariat: Ann Katrin Hergert Tannenweg 18 CH- 3012 Bern ak.hergert@bluewin.ch

35th Annual Conference of the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin Guatemala, October 17th – 24th 2015

WOMEN ON THE MOVE WITH GOD

The first day of the ICFLC annual conference was dedicated to a meeting with women of CLAI (Conference of Latin American Churches). We were introduced to several projects from this region and got the chance to get to know the women who work in this area. Nora Colomba from the ecumenical council of churches in Guatemala pointed out in her welcome speech that indigenous women in Guatemala and other Central and Southern American countries are discriminated against. In Guatemala the Mayan spirituality is important. We were welcomed by a Mayan ritual with flowers and candles, each of them having a special meaning connected to the elements of nature and to the ancestors. Mayan culture was explained, the very old Mayan calendar represents law and justice, it symbolises energy upon our planet. In Guatemala there are altars and pyramids dedicated to the Mayan classic period which show harmony with mother-nature, with the animals, and the sun. There is a spirit of sexuality, 'bodiness' and practical everyday life in the ceremonies in which Mayan people give thanks to their ancestors. After an introduction of what FLC is all about, the present women got very enthusiastic and indicated that they want to carry further this movement in their own Latin American countries.

A series of important projects were presented: in Guatemala domestic violence is a major problem, mainly caused by poverty. Several poor families were supported by FLC to set up their own small business in making jellies to generate income. And this project changed their lives. 43 women benefitted from it. And their children go to school now, are well fed, and emotionally feel good. Another project came from the South coast of Guatemala, a warm area. It was set up to prevent violence. Unfortunately the government does not do anything against criminality until there is a dead. People are given social and theological formation so that they can form their own critical opinion. There is a whole people's movement of resistance which gives a prophetic and practical testimony against corruption, against the privatisation of the public services. Women are educated to act and become independent while they had always been told in the church to live only for god and heaven. Now they go to school and see that their husbands are machos. They do read the Bible and have circles of prayer, reflection and action. They share their experiences and look how to change the situation in their families. They sing, have fun, pray, and get energy to go on. They organise practical actions like prayer marches, cooperatives for arts and crafts, protest against the high costs of energy, protest against corruption and actions for the environment as well as awareness trainings in equality between men and women in order to change the existing patriarchal shape of family life. Nicaragua presented a project which

opens its doors for women in social need. They give trainings in pastoral counseling, sexual and reproductive health, gender violence. Sexuality and health education are a taboo in the churches. Women do not know their bodies. In a patriarchal society women do not negotiate with their husbands concerning family planning for example. Another task is to accompany women who have cancer during their chemotherapy in special shelters. These women come from very poor communities and remote areas. The project has a big impact on the quality of their lives. Cuba presented the Evangelical Seminary tackling ecumenical and diaconal issues. In spite of the political situation this seminary managed to stay open since its foundation in 1946. During the afternoon more exchange took place between the FLC committee and women from the respective projects and countries who felt very much inspired by the story of Shanti Salomon and indicated to be willing to partipate more in the FLC movement. Useful practical advices were given.

On Sunday morning we went in smaller groups to different churches of Guatemala City followed by the official opening ceremony of the 35th ICFLC annual conference in the afternoon. We also joined CLAI in a demonstration against corruption and gender violence at the corner of a big street on this Sunday, one week before the national elections for a new president.

After a very interesting visit – unfortunately on a rainy Monday – to a Mayan women's cooperative in the mountains where we were introduced to the aims of this project supported by FLC, we could buy the beautiful and colourful textiles woven by those women.

An excursion to Antigua, the beautiful former Guatemaltecan capital in colonialist Spanish style, a visit to a Macadamia nut farm and the performance of traditional Mayan music and dances by school children of Chimaltenango gave us an impression of the cultural life in Guatemala.

The ICFLC working sessions took place from Tuesday to Thursday at Mariapolis on the premises of our venue, a centre of the Focolare movement, which was explained to us by Mrs. Matita, an Argentinian member living in this centre. This movement is very big and started during World War II in Trent, Italy. After the terrible bombings a young woman and teacher named Chiara Lubich gathered young people around her and told them about the Gospel which as she believed is stronger than bombs. They went to the shelters to bring the Gospel and risked their life. They started to live in communities. In a short time many people from the little villages around joined them. Their ideals were: pray and work for unity, which is a gift of God; love the other, care for the other. When the war finished, people brought with them this new life and charisma of unity. The movement spread out all over the world. They hold international big gatherings. Focolare was given a peace award in Luxemburg. The dialogue among religions is also fundamental. And they go into politics to strive for unity on the basis of the gospel, and into business for an economy of unity. The aim is to share and not to make profit. The word 'Focolare' means fire place.

Parallel to the ICFLC working sessions CLAI held an expert meeting about gender mapping in Latin America.

As in previous years many good projects for women, children and families from all regions of the world were presented. About thirty projects were granted along with four scholarships for young

women to support them in their studies. To give a short impression of some concerns which are tackled through these projects: a feminist theological consultation, support gatherings for female pastors, awareness raising for food education, hygiene and sanitary health, Children's parks and playgrounds, trainings in self-esteem for women in prison, consultations about gender based violence against women and girls, ecumenical learning and pilgrimages, Gods creation and ecological awareness raising, income generating activities and trainings, e.g. dairy farming, peace and reconciliation work.

Next year FLC will celebrate her 60th anniversary in Louisville, Kentucky in the United States of America. This special event will be hosted by the Presbyterian women and connected to the 75th anniversary of Church Women United.

Martina Heinrichs, November 2015
ICFLC regional coordinator for Europe and ICFLC vice-president 2015-2016; on behalf of the EFECW

General Assembly of German EFECW (ÖFCFE)

4th-5th December 2015, Hannover, Germany

A well-prepared service by a group of women from Hannover in the Holy Cross Lutheran church marked the beginning of the Assembly under the title "Do it like God – become human being!" (mach es wie Gott - werde Mensch). Nearly 40 women celebrated together this time of prayer, silence, listening to the scripture and sharing.

After this, we went to our congress center and celebrated the end of 10 years of the Egeria pilgrimage. Carola Ritter gave us a presentation about the seven dimensions of the pilgrimage and a summary of the whole event. It was great and Carola got a lot of thanks for this wonderful organization, planning and troubles through all these 10 years!

For the evening there were three working groups:

a) Will there be other pilgrimages possible in the future?
b) Report from the "Pop Up Monastery", "young women" in the forum and news from CC
c) A statement concerning the German government resolution because of an area of operation of German army in Syria. All members of the conference agreed to send this statement to the different churches, members of Bundestag and so on.

And one more important point: the election of the second National Coordinator took place, because Elisabeth Bücking's term ended. The new NC is Margarete Willburger. Congratulations and all the best! We will see her in Cyprus!

by Sr. Marianne Milde CJ

EFECW statement on peace after Paris attacks (13 Nov 2015)

The Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women is deeply shocked by the attacks in Paris committed in the name of religion. This is not our understanding of faith.
We believe in a God of life and peace, of love and mercy. We believe in dialogue and communication instead of violence and death. Killing is not the solution of coping with our differences and conflicts.
We stand in solidarity with our French sisters and brothers and feel with them in their grief and losses.
And we pray:
In the midst of fear, violence and injustice all over the world and in particular in Paris during these last days
We pray to You loving God,
We cry to You merciful God,
We scream to You,
our Father and Mother: Have mercy on us.
We ask and seek Your forgiveness,
Whenever we did not witness Your love and peace,
Whenever we did not recognize the trap of evil and became selfish and closed our hearts.
But, God of peace, have mercy on us.
And have mercy on those who killed others in Your name.
Open hearts and eyes of those who are full of hatred.
In those days of sorrow, help us to stay on Your path,
Help us to be witnesses of peace and light,
Rather than be caught in a never-ending circle of cruelty.
Have mercy on us and stay with us, oh God.
Give us strength, to stay close to You, waiting and working for the day when "mercy and truth will meet, justice and peace will kiss each other".
May there be light, not darkness.
May there be love, not hatred.
May there be life, not death.
May there be talking, not killing.
May there be peace, not war. Amen

Reminder for grant application - Jacqueline Stuyt Legacy Fund

As foreseen in the constitution of the JSL Fund, an evaluation and revision of the criteria took place in 2015. The revised criteria, new application form and budget form are now available on EFECW website. Please note that the deadline for application submission for projects planned from April 2016 to March 2017, is **1st March 2016.**

Upcoming events

- Next Coordinating Committee meeting, Huissen, Netherlands, 31st March – 3rd April 2016
- Next National Coordinators' meeting, 29th June – 3rd July 2016, Larnaca, Cyprus.

Please support:

The Fellowship of the Least Coin (http://www.flc.net.ph)
and the **Ruth-Epting Fund** (www.efecw.net)

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