ECUMENICAL FORUM OF
FORUM OECUMENIQUE
ÖKUMENISCHES FORUM

EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN WOMEN
DE FEMMES CHRETIENNES D'EUROPE
CHRISTLICHER FRAUEN IN EUROPA

EFECW News

November 2020

Photo Credit: Marijana Ajzenkol

Faithful God, You who created time and holds it in your hands
You who have sprinkled our ways with temptations and joys,
Hear our prayers and praises!
Turn for good all torments and troubles we have gone through this year
Take our burdens and turn them into blessings.You can do it, God.
Mighty God, open our eyes and ears so that in Your mercy we can
see and hear the One in whom salvation and life are.
We entrust ourselves and our hope to you.
Eternal God, accept our hands raised towards You,
give us new strength and faith, so that in the time ahead
We can recognize new beginning.
Don't let us lose what we have come to realize as true:
That love is stronger than fear.
Give us brave heart, God, to win the fight for good,
To gratefully accept from Your hands what You send us
And for the path we walk to be illuminated by Your light!
Amen!

Marijana Ajzenkol, EFECW Co-President

First on-line EFECW NCs' meeting ever:
the COVID chronicles by the Forum CC from Ukraine ☺

Source: https://inwilmingtonde.com/events/covid-chronicles-delaware

10 months before the meeting. CC Skype meeting. The team is actively planning Forum events: the NC meeting in Armenia and the CC meeting in Hanover.
My friends say they have heard of the virus from China. "Aren't you scared?" Not at all! There is simply not a minute of time for this, and China is so far away… ☺

9 months before. CC Skype meeting. We are actively planning the NC event in Armenia, but already thinking about canceling the CC meeting in Hanover.
News from around the world is starting to scare… ☹
An American volunteer from my university: "You Ukrainians are always so fearful. Are you really afraid of that Chinese virus? Relax!"

8 months before. CC Skype meeting. We are still planning the NC meeting in Armenia, but the discussion of the pandemic is serious and long. The CC meeting in Hanover is canceled, we try at least to get back our money for tickets... ☹
Quarantine has started in Europe, it's sad and a little scary, but Ukraine is quite far away…

7 months before. Alarming news from Europe: NC meeting in Armenia canceled… We are so sorry!! ☹
Suddenly, our capital, Kyiv, is completely closed for quarantine, and the next day – my city, Lviv. But it's probably for a month maximum – we just can rest, do household chores…
An American volunteer from our university called with tears in his voice "We are all urgently sent home… So sad!"

6 months before. CC Skype meeting: everyone is scared.
Life came to a standstill... The worst thing is that schools, churches, theaters, cafes, parks are closed and we are afraid to see our parents... We are urgently preparing for online teaching and exams. But at the same time we enjoy close communication with the family, spring nature revival (there was never time for that!).
For the first time in my life, the whole family did not go to the church to receive the blessing and celebrate Easter. It looks like Armageddon… ☹

5 months before. CC Skype meeting: general depression and despair.
I conduct online classes with students; it is difficult – there is a great lack of live communication. But at home we prepare some new dishes every day, in the garden we explore new flowers…. Never before have my parents been helped in their garden so much, and with such great joy!! ☺

4 months before. CC Skype meeting: thinking about online Forum events.
Students take exams and defend their diplomas online – it's incredibly long and difficult!
But nature is more beautiful than ever (maybe we just didn't notice it before?)
How good that the quarantine was reduced!! For the first time in six months I watch a movie in the cinema… outdoors of course! The euphoria is as if I have won a million! ☺

3 months before. We are going to the sea!!! Hooray!! Even though it's in Ukraine, even though we passed difficult Covid tests and will be measured the temperature every day, but…. The SEA!! Beaches are empty, nature has blossomed… ☺

2 months before. CC Skype meeting: how nice is to see these faces again!!! Online NC meetings must be!! ☺
Covid situation is still bad ☹. We already know that studying at the university will be online this semester. But we are ready, – the worst has already happened in the spring; students health is crucial! So happy to see many people near churches again (only some inside…). I can meet friends in a cafe – we didn't even expect it anymore!!! ☺

1 month before the meeting. CC Skype meeting: we approved all the details of the NC online meeting. How well everything was planned by Fiona and Maria! ☺
For the first time I do not hold classes in September – due to the pandemic they are postponed for 1 month…

September 28. 38 women from all over Europe!! Such nice familiar faces and personal stories! What a great experience! Positive emotions beyond any expectations! Tears of joy!!

Thank God and you for an amazing time together!
Looking very much forward to seeing you again!! ☺

Natalya Horbal, EFECW Coordinating Committee

EFECW NC online meeting

***28th September, "...for wherever you go I shall go, and wherever you live, I shall live..."* Ruth 1:16**

My Dear Sisters in Christ,

I would like to share with you my thoughts on this verse from book of Ruth. This is one of the three books in the Bible named by name of woman. The role of Ruth is more important for me, because, if Esther, being a Jewish woman, saved her people, Ruth was a foreign woman, a Moabites, who had her religion, her customs, her loved country, but this young woman left everything to assist and to encourage Naomi.

Who was Naomi for her? A woman, a Jewish woman, her mother-in-low, who lost her family: husband and two sons. This is a real tragedy for a woman. Naomi gave freedom to the wives (Ruth and Orpha) of her sons, to continue their life as they prefer, but Ruth wisely drew close to Naomi during a time of grief and loss. Ruth's step teaches us that in face of unbeatable loss or crisis, it is wise to seek comfort and solace in others and to care for each other.

There is no lack of grief, crisis, poverty, illness, loneliness in today's world. In our own times, which the Bible calls «critical times hard to deal with», we face all type of losses as well as grief (2 Tim. 3:1). Especially today, when we didn't overcome the corona virus and our losses from Covid-19 are continuing, in Armenia a war started. People are dying just for defending their right to live in their homeland. Even in this hard moments, we should have Ruth's love exemple.

Ruth's loyal love is a powerful force for good in this world. It is love, care and responsabilites for each other. To stay for each other and not to be left alone in hard times. We need this love in family relations, we need it in friendships, and we need it in sisterhood in EFECW and in the churches.

The choice of Ruth to follow to Naomi is a start to take care for each other, to allow to caregiver to stand for her. The extended hand for help rises hope for new life. Here we learn how the help and deeds of a young woman may unite with the experience and far-sightedness of an older woman to bare good fruits. This is a good example of sisterhood in which there is no difference of age and nationality, no difference of customs and belief. God united these two women to change not only their own life, but to fulfil His great plan.

Dear sisters, I pray that out love to each other and our care for each other make this world better starting from our environment:

Prayer: Jesus, wisdom of the Father, give me the wisdom to think, to speak and to do what is good in Your eyes; keep me away from evil thoughts, words and deeds. Have mercy on Your creatures and heal all sick people, give consolation to the bereaved families. O Lord, full our hearts love, faith and hope. Amen

Marianna Apresyan, EFECW Co-President

EFECW National Coordinators' meeting online

Monday 14th December 2020, 18:00-20:00 (CET-Brussels, Warsaw, Zagreb)

"Keep awake therefore, for you know neither they day not the hour." (Matthew 25, 1-13)

The parable of the ten bridesmaids in the Gospel of Matthew is difficult to understand. It doesn't show much solidarity between the wise and the foolish bridesmaids. It raises fear in the hearer of being among the foolish bridesmaids, who didn't manage their oil well, and who will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. This parable urges us to reflect how we manage our inner resources in these times of crisis. It is vital to keep a reserve of faith and hope within our hearts – an extra flask of oil in case our light flickers.

It also urges us also to question the political, social and economic strategies of our European nations. In the recent months, women in our midst have been witnesses to the Covid pandemic, to the war in Nagorno Karabakh, to terrorist attacks in France and Austria, and more. How can our nations heal? How can their mission be strengthened, to be safe spaces for all their residents and for all who come to them in need of protection? With our eyes on the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom that we long for today, let us exchange frankly our perspectives on these questions, and strengthen each other in faith and hope for the times to come.

As we often sing during our meetings "Sister carry on", we will carry on by adapting to social distancing while the world is still fighting with Covid19 pandemic, and finding other ways to meet and interact.

Detailed instructions will be sent to all National Coordinators including information about the meeting; how to use Zoom (web version or downloaded application); and password to connect to the meeting.

All National Coordinators will receive a link and password to the Zoom NC meeting. If you wish other members of your group/organisation (up to 2 per organisation) to participate you will need to send their full name and emails to info@efecw.net by **12th December 2020.**

"Beginning is one thing, and going on is something else“

Women’s spaces in Swiss Church and society from 1958 until today

What common ground is there really between churches and autonomous spaces, between passionate rebels and fighters on one side and seemingly conservative ladies patiently working on institutional transformation on the other? Our new book makes this connection visible, showing how rebellious and passionate the three theologians Marga Bührig, Else Kähler and Ruth Epting really were, as they contributed for decades to an opening of conservative Church structures in Switzerland and beyond. It brings the Church spaces to light in which more and more courageous and progressive women’s work was built up in the 70ies and 80ies, before the spaces were abruptly closed and the Church distanced itself from its too radical sisters. The book talks about the disappointment and spiritual wounds that this abrupt end meant for the involved women. It goes on to highlight the challenge of intergenerational dialogue, of “passing on the tradition” within the women’s movement, and shows examples of such initiatives that happen in Zurich, in the autonomously organised “Women*s Center”.

From left to right: Josefina Hurtado (Mission 21), Evelyne with Tristan, Dolores Zoé Bertschinger (co-author), and Tania Oldenhage (Forum für Zeitfragen)

The two book launches in Basel and Zurich (25th September and 3rd October 2020 respectively) happened in two very different women’s spaces that showed how varied the women’s movement is in reality. In Basel, it took place in Zwinglihaus, a church building of the Reformed Church of Basel which hosts the Forum für Zeitfragen, the church’s institution for adult education. Tania Oldenhage, the director of this institution and host of the first book launch, linked her impression of the book with her own history with the women’s movement in Zurich. Magdalena Zimmermann, Vice-Director of Mission 21, protestant Mission Basel, spoke about Ruth Epting’s experiences as a woman theologian in Basel and later as the first female teacher in the Seminary of the Protestant Church of Cameroon. In both contexts she confronted very conservative and hostile attitudes. And in both

contexts she inspired new ideas about women's roles in Church and society to the men who surrounded her. Around 50 people attended this book launch, and their interest was most often motivated by their own involvement in the events discussed in the book. Many women told me their own experiences as young women in Switzerland, and about their relationships with the three theologians.

In Zurich, the book launch took place in the "Women*s Center"; the women who attended this event came from a very different background. They were more critical and disappointed of the Church, and questioned the institutional organisations more openly. Can the women's movement even flourish in institutionalised form? Are there limits to the dialogue between women of different attitudes and backgrounds in the women's movement? These questions and many more were raised during the discussion that I had with my co-author Dolores Zoé Bertschinger and with Christina Caprez, who published a book in 2019 about her grandmother Greti Caprez Roffler, Switzerland's first woman pastor, who worked for two years as a village pastor in the 1930ies in the Grisons. Here in the Women*s Center, the participants were welcome to react directly to what was said or to contribute their own testimony, which enriched the discussion further.

Since October, the book has sold well and we have received many encouraging reactions. We are very happy that it is being well received. So much of women's history has yet to be researched and made accessible to the public. May this book be a first small contribution!

Fraum: Our sofa-talk during the book launch in Zurich, with Christina Caprez*

Evelyne Zinsstag, EFECW Coordinating Committee

News from EFECW members

Creation Day 2020 in Hannover, Germany, 18th September 2020

Nine women of EFECW-Hannover came together on 18th September to celebrate Creation Day in the wide "English Garden" of Hannover-Herrenhausen. We gathered in the shade of a huge beech tree. Every one gave a brief statement, how she managed her life in times of corona. Then each of us was asked to look out for her favourite tree, most of them about 300 years old, solitaires on the wide lawn! "Make contact with your tree in whatever way you like." We listened to its breath, to the birds, smelled the earth and the grass and stroke the stem or the leaves trying to make friends with this witness of "tempi passati."

For the next hour we went to a public, but hidden place on the backside of a museum, were we found some plain benches forming a square. Waltraud Kaemper held a service based on John 15,5. "I am the vine and you are the branches." As singing together is not allowed, one lady sang three hymns, one of them about this bible verse of John!

In the intersessions we called the names of our colleagues, who couldn't come, we thought of the women in Belarus, especially three nurses, who had come to the last EFECW-meeting "Around the Baltic Sea" in May 2019.

Before we started our service, I had sent an email to one of these ladies. And when the ceremony ended, I got an answer. Irinia wrote that they were safe but very upset because of the reduction of life.

When we parted, our hearts were warm with thankfulness for this meeting with friends in the age between 52 and 93 years, who do so much in their neighbourhood or among people in need.

Elke Johanna Kulenkampff

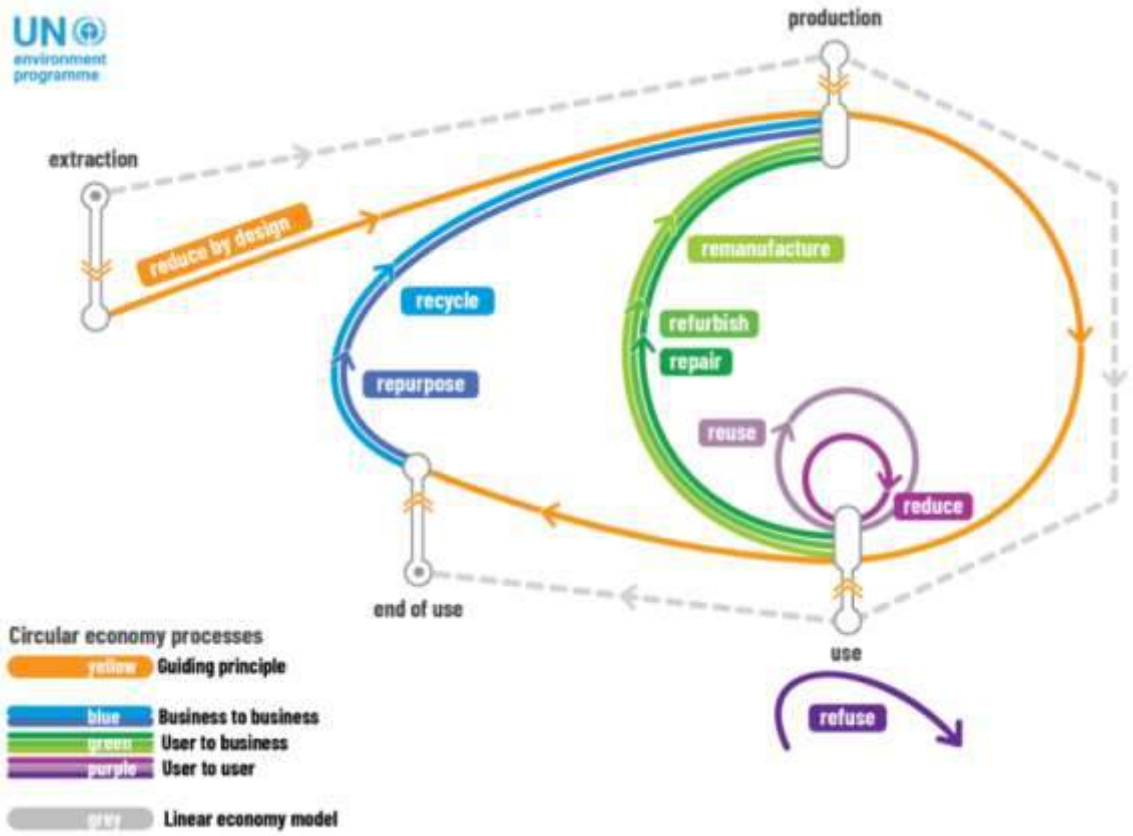
Meeting of EFECW women in Zemun, Serbia, 28th October 2020

Crisis, COVID-19, Circularity: Cooperation is Crucial!

In the framework of the Erasmus+ project «EU competitiveness boosting: circular economy» 610641-EPP-1-2019-1-UA-EPPJMO-MODULE

The Covid-19 pandemic *revealed* the vulnerability of global systems to protect the environment, health, and economy. It has almost brought world economies to a halt. Global growth is projected at −4.4 percent in 2020 and at 5.2 percent in 2021. After the rebound in 2021, global growth is expected to gradually slow to about 3.5 percent into the medium term. This implies only limited progress toward catching up to the economic growth for 2020–25 projected before the pandemic and a major setback to the projected improvement in average living standards globally. Moreover, the risk of worse growth outcomes than projected remains sizable, considering the severity of the recession[1].

Among other consequences, the crisis has highlighted the shortcomings of the traditional linear economic system, where raw materials are used to make products, and afterwards all waste are thrown away. This linear process is optimised towards high volume and low production costs in conditions of wide availability of resources and materials at low cost, which causes substantive pollution, environmental degradation, climate change, biodiversity loss, etc.

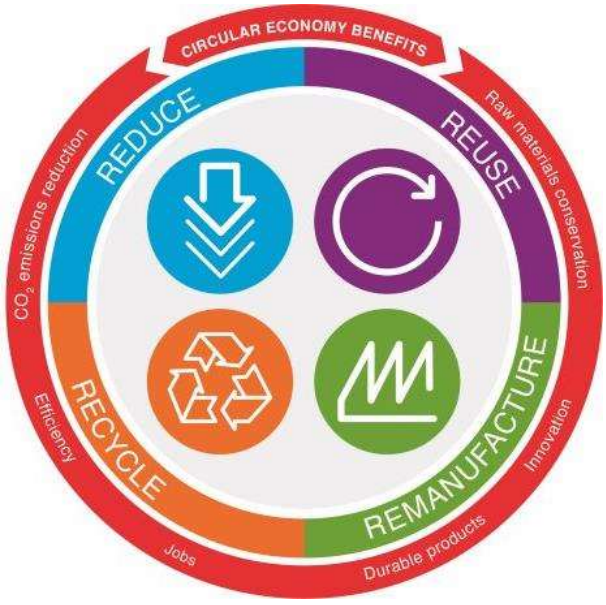


However, recently, t*he call for a more resilient, circular and low-carbon economic model has garnered support from a growing number of businesses and governments over the past few years, and appears today more relevant than ever.* It is crucial for policymakers to address the global risks

[1] *World Economic Outlook, October 2020: A Long and Difficult Ascent*. https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2020/09/30/world-economic-outlook-october-2020.

of our current linear economies as they aim at creating a more sustainable economy and reducing the risks of future global shocks. Achieving a recovery from the crisis will require the rethinking, resetting, and redesigning of the economy from one that is merely reactive in a time of crisis to one that is prosperous, inclusive, low-carbon, and mitigates the risk of future crises[2].

Thus, many developed countries (first of all, European) have strived to switch from a linear to a circular economy, where materials are reused, and if new materials are needed, they must be obtained sustainably so that the environment is not damaged. In 2015, the European Commission adopted the Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP), and in March 2020 – a new Circular Economy Action Plan – Europe's new agenda for sustainable growth. A circular economy is one of the EU's main policy priorities nowadays, resulting in global leadership in its implementation.



Source 1: www.steel.org.au/focus-areas/environmental-sustainability

A circular economy aims to maintain the value of products, materials and resources by returning them into the product cycle at the end of their use, while minimizing the generation of waste. It can contribute to several different Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 2 End hunger (via sustainable food production), SDG 6 Clean water, SDG 7 Affordable and clean energy, SDG 12 Responsible consumption and production, SDG 13 Climate action, and SDG 15 Sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems[3].

The main advantages of the circular economy model are: 1) optimal waste disposal; 2) innovative and resource efficient methods of production and consumption; 3) energy savings due to a closed production cycle; 4) reducing the negative impact on the environment; 5) protecting the economy from resource scarcity. They also include resources preservation; costs saving for industries; unlocking new business opportunities; building a new generation of innovative, resource-efficient businesses; creating jobs and opportunities for social integration and cohesion.

As the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's research has highlighted, a circular model could lead to a 50% reduction of pesticides and synthetic fertiliser use by 2030 in Europe (compared to 2012 levels), while resulting in a 12% drop in household expenditure and better products. It can as well reduce CO2 emissions by 5.6 billion tonnes.

Yet, despite the progress and growing momentum behind the circular economy, the world is only 9% circular so far.

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[2] *Ellen MacArthur Foundation, Circular economy and the Covid-19 recovery: How policymakers can pave the way to a low-carbon and prosperous future (2020).*

[3] *Circular Economy: Waste-to-Resource & COVID-19. http://www.fao.org/land-water/overview/covid19/circular/en/.*

And ironically, under the current restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 crisis, waste management which are crucial to protect public health and the environment, has become a challenge due to labor shortage and exposure risk. An increase in plastic production in 2020, specifically in the form of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), to meet rising demands should also be mentioned. So far, PPE is the most convenient and reliable means for personal protection, with a market size of more than $40 billion in 2019. The high use of PPE has meant that the world should increase its manufacturing of this form of plastic by approximately 40%. The plastic pollution will continue to increase as long as innovation and technology are not put in place to prompt recycling, upcycling, green-products development, and waste reuse[4].

This forces the global system to balance between public health, economics, and environment.

Policies to support the economy should therefore be designed based on ways of stronger, equitable, and resilient growth. Only by building a more sustainable world through enhanced international collaboration can we overcome this threat to humanity. Given the global nature of the shock and common challenges, strong multilateral efforts are needed to fight the worldwide health and economic crisis. As Director-General of the World Health Organization Dr. T.A. Ghebreyesus said, «I urge all leaders to choose the path of cooperation! It's not just the smart choice, it's the right choice and it's the only one we have».

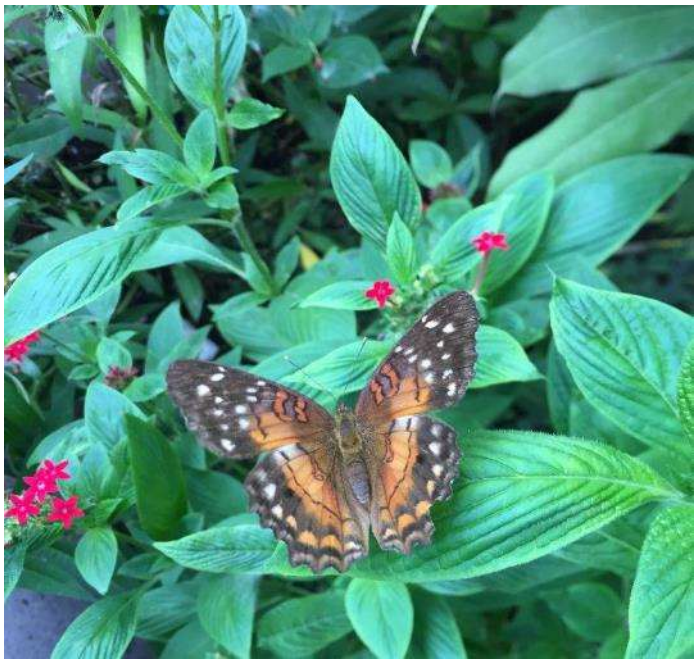

Photo credit: Anne-Marie Schott

The global success in these difficult times will rely on the worldwide solidarity, involvement and cooperation of each of us.

So, are you ready to cooperate on circularity?

Natalia Horbal, EFECW CC member,

Associate Professor of the Lviv Polytechnic National University (Ukraine)

4 *The circular economy vs. COVID-19. https://leadersinternational.org/the-circular-economy-vs-covid-19/.*

International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin – ICFLC

40th annual meeting, October 2020, online

This year's annual meeting of the ICFLC was supposed to take place in Puerto Rico on the invitation of CLAI, the conference of Latin American Churches. But very soon after planning and at the beginning of 2020 it became clear that we will not be able to travel and to meet in person, due to the pandemic COVID 19. Smoothly the officers together with the Executive Secretary switched to the preparations of an online meeting. Which meant that we finally ended up to meet at the most strange and various moments of the day or night, being spread over so many time zones all over the globe. Three business sessions of two hours turned out to be insufficient to work on the entire agenda. So we added one more business meeting and extended most of the other sessions for an hour and a half. All-in all a good experience for a policy we already had decided for, to reduce costs: we had planned to hold every other year a physical meeting and in the in-between year we would work online. For the future we hope that we can hold on to this altering system, as we experienced that an online meeting can never replace the real contact and informal talks among each other.

Of course, Corona had an impact on the content of our work. As we announced already last year our offerings were going down. And we had foreseen that we will have to cut the block grants to our member organisations as well as the financial support for the project applications. In this COVID year the income decreased even more. Due to social distancing many in-gathering services had been canceled all over the world. We had to decide to take a part from our savings and to reduce the maximum amounts of all grants so that the FLC work can go on. For the first time a new scholarship has been given: not only to young women of the Global South as before but now also a Bursary for Older Women BOW to support them in their income generating activities. Many project applications reflected on the situation of women in the worldwide Corona crisis which hits women and children most: increasing domestic violence in lockdown situations, growing alcoholism, violence against women and children on the streets, young girls' unwanted pregnancies, difficult economic circumstances and unemployment, women working in the households or tourist industry losing their jobs, women and their children in ethnic minorities, homeless women, cooking or sewing projects for women, anti-discrimination trainings for church leaders, centres to struggle against HIV aids, summer camps for single mothers and children of poor areas. And many other important concerns. We were happy that despite of the tight financial situation we were able to support all these initiatives even if the amount is smaller. Every year FLC gives also emergency grants to regions which had been hit by a natural disaster. This time the support was sent to the Bahamas during the hurricane in September 2019, to India because of the floods in East-India in August 2020 and to the Philippines in January 2020 when there was a big volcanic eruption.

For me, personally, this online meeting marks the end of my second and last term of being the regional coordinator for Europe in the ICFLC, sent by the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women. Unfortunately 'only' online and not in Puerto Rico as planned. There was really no time to come to know each other, to have informal talks with women from twelve partner or member organisations from all over the world. There were no project visits, no tour to see the country, no encounters with local people which make these Annual Meetings so enriching and interesting. I can look back on eight years of exciting meetings at amazing places with interesting and diverse women, such as South Korea in 2013 as a women's pre-conference to the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Busan; 2014 in the Philippines including the visit to the FLC office and being guests at the Asian Church Women's Conference (ACWC) in Tagaytay; 2015 in Guatemala; 2016 in Louisville Kentucky combined with the 70th anniversary of Church Women United (CWU); 2017 in Slovenia in cooperation with World Day of Prayer (WDP) Slovenia; 2018 in Thailand again connected to the General Assembly of the Asian Church Women's Conference (ACWC) in Bangkok; and 2019 in the Abokobi Presbyterian Women's Centre in Ghana.

I have learned so many things about life, work and faith of women all over the world, about their circumstances of living, their challenges, fears, hopes and successes. About their societies and about which impact churches and faith can have. As everywhere in dialogue there were similarities and differences. We were however united in the same aim: to use the least coins coming from the prayers of women from all over the world for a better life of women and children. Or as Shanti Salomon, who started FLC more than sixty years ago, formulated the goals: for Justice, Peace and Reconciliation. Integrity of Mother Earth will probably be added next year.

I thank the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin and all its members whom I met in the last eight years for the good cooperation, the inspiring talks and the warm solidarity. And my thanks goes also to the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women to have chosen me to take part in this worldwide ecumenical women's movement and to represent the women of Europe.

Wishing all God's blessing for the future of women and children in this world, in connectedness.

Martina Heinrichs

ICFLC Regional Coordinator for Europe

On behalf of the EFECW Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women

Keeping faith – Transforming tomorrow

1st Assembly on Women, Faith & Diplomacy

Lindau / online, 10th-13th November 2020,

To focus on the nexus of gender, faith and diplomacy Religious for Peace (https://www.rfp.org/), Ring for Peace (https://ringforpeace.org/) supported by the German Federal Foreign Office invited more than 1,000 international religious leaders, diplomats, and representatives from government, civil society, women, men and youth and academia from more than 90 countries: to assess, learn from one another and exchange on peacebuilding, conflict transformation, sustainable development and multi-religious collaboration.

Peace and Religion

Why should religions be involved? Because faith is a central part of thought, belief, and behaviour across the world. Many are the actors around the world at different levels who have failed to recognise the centrality, marginalising the impact of religion and women of faith in peacebuilding and diplomacy. For religious leaders, women and men it is a matter of course to be engaged. Faith is inspiration to activism. Faith equips us to listen to others. Faith is what we do, TOGETHER.

Women in the public space is an opportunity not a threat

Witnesses and stories were told, and voices were heard during the conference from many women and some men around the world on how they work, taking leadership together in all kinds of communities for peace, for a healthy planet and co-existence. So many women´s stories but so unseen! One speaker said: “It gives a sense of not speaking out. It is time for change!” How can we achieve equality in both faith and diplomacy? Through the understanding that gender equality is not just men and women. It is a particular way of orienting our understanding of life and also accepting that women´s presence in the public space is not a threat but an opportunity. Women is already significant members of the normally male oriented spaces. “It is a question to see them and start to work together.” says Azza Karam, the new Secretary General for Religions for Peace since 2019.

The art of diplomacy

May be, normally we think that professional diplomats are doing diplomacy, but in this contexts in the conference diplomacy opened the perspective on informal structures and multiple strategies of negotiation and mediation, in which many women of faith often play essential roles to build peace, advance human development and uphold and protect human rights. Women of faith are diplomats. In our daily life we are diplomates in different ways if life, said a woman from Kenya.

Women are key for a modern leadership

Leadership is built on service. Stewardship is about service. Leadership is built on service. Women are always serving in all situations. Jesus called women to bring the message of his resurrection to the disciples. Junia was an apostle and Lydia the founder of the first parish in Europe. The same for women in other faith traditions.

But the examples of women leaders at high-level are not that many. There are many experiences of women's high-level leadership in Africa, Asia, Latin-American and the Middle East. But we can't still find many of them in Europe and North America. Kamela Harris, vice president elect in USA, is a recent example of woman in high-level leadership. Angela Merkel, the German Federal Chancellor, who we know since before was one of the leaders welcoming us to the conference.

This year 2020 is the Superpower Gender Equality Year of Beijing 25+ and 20 years since the UN Resolution 1325 Women, Peace and Security, but still we are missing many women at the negotiation's tables. Which means that perspectives for sustainable peace building are missing. It is not said that women are better peace builders than men but have other experiences to bring to the table. Women use power differently. Women try hard to make transparent in what way and for what goals they use their position. So how can we change this? Education was a topic, to understand our own context as well as the context of the other.

The Covid-19 pandemic

The conference was held in the shadow of the pandemic. No personal meetings but a lot of exchange, new acquaintances, sharing spiritual life, expressing hope and technical learnings. Nevertheless, the faith communities were very early engaged in supporting when the pandemic overwhelmed us in different part of the world. Religions for peace founded the Multi-religious Humanitarian Fund to support interfaith groups around the world for their local collaboration. https://rfpasia.org/application-for-multi-religious-humanitarian-fund-in-response-to-covid-19/

Faith and leadership

Faith is the relation to the other, to generations before, now and coming. “Hope is essential in faith.” “Hope is sustained in the people.” “Faith is peoplehood.” are some voices from the speakers. Religions for Peace is celebrating 50 years of existence this year. Religious leaders are taking responsibility to create peace. We are different in expressing our faith. To be different is not bad. It gives us diversity to see the different perspectives of life. The youth say, we are here now, not only in the future. The work together must happen now, not tomorrow.

Lessons learnt for the future

So many women heard in the conference. But what prevents women in our faith traditions from taking leadership? It was said that women are key for modern leadership. Women of faith still need to undertake the challenge to redefine leadership!

Leadership is about serving. Women are leaders because they serve others. Faith is where we find resilience.

Peace is a journey that all of us must take part in every day…

Carin Gardbring, EFECW Coordinating Committee

Women, Faith and Diplomacy in Europe

A position paper prepared in consultation with members and friends of the European Religions for Peace movement, November 2020.

Political and diplomatic leadership

All people, whether religious or secular, need cooperation. We all face the same threats of environmental disaster, inequality and discrimination, political polarisation, fundamentalism and violent extremism. By promoting shared responsibilities for the common good, we can together harness our resources and our networks to tackle some of the greatest challenges of our time. Interreligious, Civil society and public sector partnerships can strengthen movements for sustainability, gender equality; interreligious education; peace, justice, inclusion; and freedom of thought, conscience and belief.

There is a perception that national leaders who are women have coped better than male leaders, with the Covid-19 pandemic. The likes of Jacinda Ardern, Angela Merkel and Tsai Ing-wen have been hugely impressive, demonstrating strong political leadership, bringing their communities with them through a sense of shared responsibility and solidarity. They have in common the fact they are women, but what really should be taken from their examples is their focus on collaborating with others, whether it be ministers, civil society, individuals and communities - demonstrating heart-centred not just head-centred leadership.

Political organisations are still driven by male models of power and influence, so in order for women to be influential in existing organisations they often feel compelled into having to present a 'male' style of influence – which tends to be more status driven and individualistic, than relational and collaborative. There is a call to promote a model for organizational influence which focuses on making change, rather than being in charge. Moving beyond ego, competition, and control; a leadership style open to people of any gender.

There is a call for a greater movement of sisterhood, for women to support each other to achieve common goals. Women are less visible in politics and high level diplomacy. Women remain underrepresented in government, business, United Nations negotiations, justice systems, and in finance. The gender pay gap persists in many countries. Women need to empower other women.

There is a call for both more women and particularly younger people (<35 years) to be more present in number and more visible within our national governments and European level inter-governmental bodies – and to be given meaningful roles.

Women of Faith and their resources for building peaceful societies

Women of faith play important roles in their communities and also demonstrate many different forms of leadership, which can be formal, but is often more subtle, informal and less visible than men, but no less valuable. In many communities women have different kinds of networks to men and are influential within these networks.

Virtues of empathy, compassion and solidarity are not necessarily reserved for women. However, more and more women in leadership are demonstrating that you can be kind and you can be strong, you can be compassionate and you can be strong-minded, you can be collaborative and you can lead. Inspiring men and women alike.

Hospitality has been a very important tool in 'welcoming the other' for thousands of years. Many women of different faiths have a lot of experience bringing people together to share food-welcoming different faiths, ethnicities, including migrants, to share experiences and relations together.

Women of faith are not immune to the struggles of women globally, who are disproportionately victims of violence and abuse. This is no different in Europe where the Covid-19 pandemic saw a

surge in domestic abuse cases. Women of faith in Europe, as in other regions, play a key role in their communities in supporting other women facing such challenges. Their support may be quiet, unacknowledged, most likely informal, but nonetheless vital in building more peaceful societies.

Women within the Religions for Peace European networks have shown a particular concern for engagement with youth and recognise that young women do not always have the opportunities to show their leadership skills. Women leaders are keen to support the development of younger women within religious and interreligious networks, and to support emerging leaders.

Examples of European multi-religious initiatives which attempt to contribute positively to a sustainable environment; gender equality; interreligious education; peaceful, just and inclusive societies; and freedom of thought, conscience and belief, include:

Goda Grannar (Sweden) (Refugees); Coexister (multi religious initiatives in Europe, responding to racism, Islamophobiaand Anti-semitism); United Religions Initiative (URI) Europe; Faith for Climate (UK); Youth for Peace Bosnia and Herzegovina (Peace education); Believers for Peace (Balkans); Safe Haven - Responding to Racism and Religious Hatred (Ireland); Speech4Change Campaign; The Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation; The Forgiveness Project; Nishkam Schools Sikh led Interfaith Education; Lokahi Foundation; Nisa Nashim; Interfaith Rainforest Initiative; Salaam Shalom; Interfaith UK; Interfaith Scotland; Faith for the Climate; The Faith and Belief Forum; Three Faiths Forum

Religions for Peace European Movement:

European Council of Religious Leaders; European Women of Faith Network; European Interfaith Youth Network; National Interreligious Councils; Finland; Germany; Albania; Bulgaria; Croatia; Italy; Russia; United Kingdom; Romania; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Spain; Austria; Belgium; Netherlands; All Ireland (In development); Hungary (In development); Kosovo (In development); Poland (In development); Some countries also have established women and youth networks

Please, find more for reading:

#FaithInspiresPeace

#rfpwomenfaithdiplomacy.

https://www.rfp.org/

https://ringforpeace.org/

To be engaged in interfaith networking if not already are,

please look for the national interfaith networks.

Serving a Wounded World in Interreligious Solidarity:

A Christian call to Reflection and Action during COVID-19 and beyond

World Council of Churches

The World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) released this joint document to encourage churches and Christian organisations to reflect on the importance of interreligious solidarity in a world wounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. The document offers a Christian basis for interreligious solidarity that can inspire and confirm the impulse to serve a world wounded not only by COVID-19 but also by many other wounds. Find full text here

Recommendations

We call upon all Christians to serve our neighbours, and to serve alongside them, taking into consideration the recommendations below.

1. Find ways of bearing witness to suffering, drawing attention to it, and challenging any forces that aim to silence or exclude the voice of the wounded and vulnerable among us, holding accountable the people and structures behind this suffering.

2. Promote a culture of inclusivism which celebrates difference as God's gift, to counter all signs of exclusivism we see today in our societies at various levels. This needs to begin within family life and continue through other social institutions. To this end, we recommend the responsible use of social media to enhance healthy and constructive communication, to amplify the message of peace and solidarity.

3. Nurture solidarity through spirituality, considering how traditional spiritual practices such as prayer, fasting, self-denial and almsgiving can be more deeply infused with an awareness of the needs of the wider world and of our call to be in solidarity with the suffering.

4. Widen the formation of clergy, members of religious communities and orders (both men and women), laity, pastoral workers, and students to foster empathy and to equip them with the best knowledge and the tools to work for a wounded humanity in cooperation with others.

5. Engage and support young people, whose idealism and energy can be an antidote to the temptation of cynicism, in the endeavour to heal the wounded world of which we are part.

6. Create space for dialogues (as this document aims to do) that are embracing and inclusive. Learn from members of other religions about their motivation, principles and recommendations for working in interreligious solidarity, so that we may grow closer both in understanding and cooperation. Hold space for the marginalized to be heard and respected, offering places of

belonging. Create platforms for different groups to be in each other's company so that they can grow in love and understanding.

7. Restructure projects and processes for interreligious solidarity through an examination of ongoing projects, and existing strengths, to establish where these would gain from work in cooperation with other communities, organizations or agencies. Restructure projects in a way that affirms the diversity in which we are created. Our work can only reflect the fullness of humanity if we resist the temptation to stay "amongst ourselves." Serving a wounded world together makes neighbours of us all.

Conclusion

Ecumenical and interreligious solidarity enable our religious commitment to become a factor that unites, rather than divides, people. When we work hand in hand with believers of other faiths and people of goodwill, we model the peace, justice and interconnectedness which are at the heart of our faith convictions, while at the same time recreating and reinforcing these values.

For Christians, interreligious solidarity is a way both of living out Jesus Christ's commandment to love the other, and also of working with the other to seek peace, which is God's will for the world. Growing in love for those whom we help, for those with whom we help, and for those who help us, creates many ways for us to live fully into what God created us to be – bearers of the divine image, and sharers of this image with others.

As we open ourselves to serving a world wounded by COVID-19 through ecumenical and interreligious solidarity, may we derive strength from the example of the one we follow, Jesus the Christ. He came not to be served but to serve (Matthew 20:28). Imitating the love and generosity of the Good Samaritan, let us seek to support the weak and vulnerable, console the afflicted, relieve pain and suffering and ensure the dignity of all. May we, by opening our hearts in dialogue and by opening our hands in solidarity, build together a world marked by healing and hope.

Photo credit: Anne Marie Schott

Open Letter to permanent representative to the United Nations

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Resolution 1325 (2000)

Dear Ambassadors,

Twenty years ago, the architects of Resolution 1325 created history, not only by recognizing the brutal and disproportionate reality of conflict for women and girls around the world, but also by recognizing the importance of their equal participation in all aspects of peace and security. Yet, reflecting on these founding principles of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, it is clear that while there has been some progress, these words have remained rhetoric rather than lived reality for the 264 million women and girls living in conflict across the globe.

Among the statements delivered by the over 138 women civil society leaders from 32 countries to the UN Security Council so far, women's equal participation has been a central demand. You have heard accounts of how women in North Kivu demanded their right to participate in the peace process in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, only to be told that there were "only two parties in the conflict," and that women were not one of them; from **Afghan** women calling on the international community to stand by them and ensure that their rights would not be traded away for a peace deal; and from **Syrian**, **Yemeni** and **Sudanese** women speaking in one voice about how no democratic future in their countries is possible without women's equal participation. Women civil society have also called for greater inclusion and representation of all groups, including those most marginalized — for example, of ethnic communities across **Myanmar**; of Afro-descendant, Indigenous, rural and LBTIQ women in **Colombia**; and of **Palestinian** women, who have lived through the world's longest occupation. Their collective message has been clear: formal peace processes have systematically failed to include women, and in doing so, have replicated the inequality and discrimination that caused conflict and violence in the first place. We have 20 years' worth of evidence of the causes and consequences of gender inequality and women's exclusion. Seventy-nine percent of armed conflicts have taken place in contexts with high levels of gender discrimination and research has repeatedly confirmed that gender inequality is a root cause of conflict. In addition, the consequences of excluding women in peace processes are equally evident in conflicts across the globe: the eight peace agreements in **Central African Republic** adopted in as many years and the nine peace initiatives adopted in **Libya** in the last five years both failed to meaningfully include women; both conflicts continue to deteriorate. We have seen similarly exclusionary processes in contexts like **Haiti**, **Iraq** and **Somalia**, leading to the same conclusion: processes that fail to include all members of society result in agreements that do not reflect their priorities and rights, setting the stage for future conflict.

The goal of the WPS agenda is sustainable peace and security for all people; preventing conflict and ensuring that peace lasts are therefore the very reasons for inclusivity and the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all their diversity.

Full, equal and meaningful participation means direct, substantive and formal inclusion of diverse women so that they can influence the outcome of negotiations and other processes and their implementation. Participation without the ability to influence the outcome is not participation, it is

observation. Ensuring meaningful participation requires dismantling systemic gender inequality and discrimination; addressing barriers to participation, including patriarchal structures, sexual and gender-based violence and lack of access to healthcare, and the inaccessibility of information about, communications within, and spaces where peace processes take place; and proactively ensuring that diverse women are included.

Women human rights defenders, especially women land and environmental defenders, peacebuilders and civil society today face increasing repression around the world — the killing of women activists in **Colombia** increased by almost 50% in the space of one year, and the well-documented and systematic repression of women who speak out against warring parties in countries like **Yemen** and **Libya** continues to be both a symptom and a leading cause of closing civic space in these contexts. Threats and attacks on human rights defenders and peacebuilders are unacceptable and serve as a deterrent to their participation and leadership, especially in contexts where women must already overcome cultural, political, economic or other barriers to entering public life. It is therefore essential that their integral, independent role in promoting human rights, preventing conflict and ensuring peace is recognized and defended.

On the 20th anniversary of the adoption of Resolution 1325, we join our voices with those of women leaders and activists around the globe to reiterate the principle at the foundation of the WPS agenda — **nothing less than the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of peace and security.**

We agree with Secretary-General Guterres that "women's inequality should shame us all," and welcome his commitment to "do everything in [his] power to make sure women are represented in all decision-making at the United Nations, including in peace processes." As the international community takes its next steps to address new challenges to peace and security, including climate change and public health crises such as COVID-19, it is critical that *all* processes prioritize women's participation.

We urge all Member States, the UN and international leaders to commit their full political support to making women's direct and formal participation a requirement in all UN-supported peace processes and take all possible steps to ensure women's full, equal and meaningful participation in all peace and security processes.

Women's direct and formal participation can be achieved by:

● **Prioritizing, resourcing and actively supporting the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and girls** in all their diversity in all aspects of peace and security, including conflict prevention efforts, peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements.

● **Grounding all peace and security policymaking, strategies and programs in international human rights and humanitarian law**, including by guaranteeing the full scope of all women's human rights in conflict-affected and humanitarian settings.

● **Preventing threats and violence against diverse women leaders, human rights defenders and peacebuilders**, which can deter their future participation in peace and security processes, including

by elevating their work and their role in promoting peace and human rights.

● **Holding all actors, including the UN and other relevant regional organizations, accountable** for ensuring the direct participation of diverse women in all peace and political processes, from design to monitoring and implementation.

2020 has already been a year like no other, resonating with the calls of powerful social movements demanding racial justice and calling for deep, structural change to address the many inequalities laid bare by an unprecedented global pandemic. The world is changing and all international actors, including the Security Council and the UN, must change with it — now more than ever, exclusion of any kind is unacceptable, especially in matters of peace.

The road to sustainable peace and gender equality requires structural transformation, respect for human rights, collective responsibility and accountability, and inclusive, meaningful participation of conflict-affected communities. In October 2000, in advance of the adoption of Resolution 1325, feminist movements and advocates for women's rights around the world called for recognition of the work done by women peacebuilders and for their equal right to participate in all peace processes, knowing that equal representation provides a critical foundation for achieving these goals. 20 years ago, this Council took a bold first step by adopting Resolution 1325. Today, we call on you to ensure that the agenda we have collectively built is implemented in full.

Signed by 558 organisations - www.womenpeacesecurity.org

Photo credit: Anne Marie Schott

European Institute for Gender Equality

Covid-19 wave of violence against women shows EU countries still lack proper safeguards

Lockdowns to contain the coronavirus led to spikes in domestic violence reports. In two new studies, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) assesses the measures each EU country took to protect women during the pandemic and shows how governments can amplify the role of people witnessing violence.

"Women usually face the most danger from people they know. EIGE's research shows EU governments recognise this: every single country has introduced special measures to protect women from intimate partner violence during the pandemic. Yet persistent under-funding of shelters and domestic violence hotlines has resulted in sometimes patchy support," said Carlien Scheele, EIGE's Director in the lead up to the international day to eliminate violence against women.

National action plans

Ireland, Spain and Lithuania have launched national action plans to eradicate intimate partner violence during the pandemic. Spain has strengthened coordination among its health, police and justice services, as has Lithuania. Ireland has gone further by putting €160,000 on the table. With that money, the government has helped shelters and hotlines for victims adapt to new remote working conditions. Irish courts have prioritised domestic violence cases and expanded remote hearings. The police are checking up on women who have faced violence in the past.

Legislation

Several countries have adapted legislation to declare shelters and hotlines "essential services" to keep them accessible at all times. In Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia and France, legislation now obliges governments to provide women facing violence at home with alternative accommodation. Estonian courts have been empowered to issue temporary restraining orders against violent partners, protecting the victim from homelessness and pinning accountability on the abuser.

Awareness raising campaigns

Almost every EU country rolled out awareness raising campaigns to let victims know about the help available. Greece, Finland and Portugal addressed refugees and migrants, while other countries reached out to women from Roma communities, LGBTIQ+ women, or those with hearing impairments. Spain's campaign emphasised that domestic violence is a human rights violation -- not a private issue.

Awareness campaigns are important for witnesses, who can fail to intervene because they might not recognise intimate partner violence when they see it. Campaigns also provide clear guidance on how witnesses can help when they fear they will make the situation worse. Around 20–30 % of calls to domestic violence hotlines come from witnesses -- they ought to be reassured and guided through this daunting process. EIGE's research shows witnesses often want to help in ways aside from reporting to the police, for example by talking to the victim or helping them access support services. Guidance on such ways to help should also be part of campaigns.

Shelter and counselling staff

As EU countries re-enter lockdowns, governments can learn from the positive action taken during the first wave of the pandemic -- as well as the shortcomings. Shelter and counselling staff were overwhelmed with increased demand and heightened distress of victims; they felt unprepared to provide remote support and worried about victim confidentiality. There was not enough personal protective equipment to continue helping victims face-to-face.

Shaky support systems

In the majority of EU countries, the pandemic exposed overall shaky support systems for victims of gender-based violence. A lack of funding and shelter space resulted in women being put up in hotels and privately provided Airbnbs. While quick action is laudable, fire-fighting measures delivered by the private sector should not be the solution to save lives. Although natural disasters and pandemics lead to surges in violence against women globally, no EU Member State had a disaster plan in place to deal with this.

Covid-19 has shone a harsh light on how unprepared societies often are to protect victims of intimate partner violence. Government must not turn a blind eye.

Source: https://eige.europa.eu/news/covid-19-wave-violence-against-women-shows-eu-countries-still-lack-proper-safeguards

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Please continue to support:

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

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