



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

# EFECW News

March 2018

## Let the waters run

No more tears and  
sighs we hear  
A time of love has  
come  
A time for  
wonders, not for  
fear  
Let the waters run

Into the fields we  
sow the seeds  
Rejoice in all we  
've done  
The wells of home  
bring forth good  
deeds  
Let the waters run



Reach out your hand to your sister in need  
In our thirst we 're one  
Together we share what we eat  
Let the waters run

Towards the sky our song will ring  
Bubbling with joyous fun  
A bright new day our Lord will bring  
Let the waters run

*By Jaakko Löyttu (in Finnish)  
Translation Eija Kempfi*

EUROPEAN FORUM EUROPEAN WOMEN  
ECCLESIASTICAL FORUM OF EUROPEAN  
CHRISTIAN WOMEN FORUM OF EUROPEAN  
DE FEMMES CHRETIENNES EUROPE  
EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN WOMEN  
FORUM IN EUROPE



*If you remain silent in this time...(Esther 4:14):  
Christian women speak out*

Monastery Sveti Nikolaj, Soko grad, Serbia  
7-12 August 2018



## What to expect at the Xth EFECW General Assembly 7<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> August 2018, Soko Grad, Serbia

### The General Assembly

The General Assembly (GA) is the highest decision-making body of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women. Women from all the national organisations are invited to send delegations to the GA. Meeting every four years, it evaluates the past period and formulates the vision and programmatic priorities for the next years as well as elects the new leadership.

It is at the same time a space to share joys and sorrows, struggles and successes, to exchange the gifts of our varied spirituality and diverse cultures. Our goal is to create at the GA a safe atmosphere to discuss our differences in a respectful and inspiring way and learn from and about one another so that everyone feels supported and empowered to support others and so that our minds and hearts can be renewed.

The GA seeks to receive, reflect on and find ways to implement the newest ecumenical developments achieved on the global as well as on the European level. It is a space where we reflect on our situation as Christian women in Europe and raise our awareness about the pressing issues in different corners of Europe as well as on our continent as such. It is also a space where we explore new ways of worshipping together through which we express and experience spirituality.

Last but certainly not least, it also serves to empower young women and the women from the local Ecumenical Forum. At the end of the General Assembly, the life of the Forum is re-energised and delegates / participants are motivated to go ahead, pursue the priorities communally discerned and embrace the tasks in front of them.

### Theme

Each GA has a topic pertinent to the life and mission of the Forum as well as to the contemporary issues and the local context.

The theme for the Xth General Assembly comes from the Book of Esther: **“If you remain silent at this time...” (Esther 4:14): Christian women speak out.**

It brings us to the crucial moment of the biblical story when Queen Esther makes the decision to not remain silent risking her own safety to save her nation. Esther in the story is an example of courage in face of difficult circumstances. An example many women in history followed and we are also invited in our own lives and contexts to emulate. Esther evinces wisdom in the way she resists oppressive power. She shows us that no matter where we find ourselves, in our lives or on this earth, God has a plan and purpose for us just where we are. God is sovereign but acts in this world through us, people. We are invited to take part in God’s plan for this world. Furthermore, Esther does not act alone, the community prays and fasts for her and with her. She also does not act selfishly, for her own benefit, but for the others. This way her story challenges the contemporary individualistic and consumerist society and shows us the value of community. Esther is aware that she is not self-sufficient and has the need of the other, which is underlined by the fact that she accepts the advice of her relative Mordecai. And then she does not linger but acts.

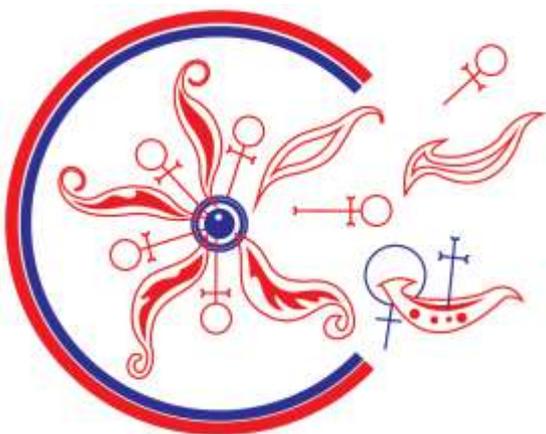
Like Esther we are invited not to remain silent in our safety and complacency, but act and speak out, change the world for better in our various contexts and involvements. At the GA we will discuss and explore ways what it means today to not remain silent. We will reflect and commit to speak out and act:

... in being instruments of peace and dialogue  
... in seeking justice and equality in churches and in society  
... in the ecumenical movement, bringing feminine perspective to ecumenical reflections  
... in searching for ways to put to practice what has been already achieved on the way to unity  
... in interpretation of the Bible  
... in family  
... in our neighbourhood  
... in refugee situation  
... in socio-political questions  
... in worship and our spiritual journey  
... in interfaith encounter  
... in situations where it seems that God is silent  
... in art  
... in any other topic relevant and important to us ...

## Methods

The EFECW seeks to employ new, modern and innovative methods of learning, sharing and discussing its thematic framework. Along with keynote speeches, we will have a variety of workshops as well as table exchange to discuss thematic ideas, a living library, excursions to understand better the local Serbian context. Beside worship and prayer moments we will create space for silence, vigil and pilgrimage. The silence will beautifully complement the theme of speaking out as well as invite us to reflect internally and enter into an ever deeper conversation with God or experience the challenging moments when God is silent. The venue offers a wonderful possibility for a pilgrimage and this will enable us to join in the effort of contemporary global ecumenical movement expressed in the World Council of Churches' Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. Through many of these spiritual moments and especially by holding a vigil we will pick up the threads and share the experience from the successful EFECW project Pop Up Monastery.

There is a lot to look forward at our next General Assembly. The CC invites you warmly and looks forward to our intensive time together.



REMINDER: *The National Organisations that have not yet composed their delegation, are kindly reminded to do so soon, and finalise registration online:*

[Xth EFECW General Assembly registration](#)

*Eva Guldanova, EFECW Co-President*

## Speakers at the GA

### Dr. Ivana Kronja

Ivana Kronja, Ph.D., was born in Belgrade in 1970. Kronja is a film scholar, film critic, and theorist of culture and the media. She is a member of Serbian National Academy for Film Art and Science (AFUN) and professor at Fine and Applied Arts School, Applied Sciences' University, Belgrade.



Her speech upon the topic “Women in media, society and culture” shall consider multi-layered and often contradictory media messages, representations of women in cinema and the media, and sets of beliefs

regarding an overall contribution and importance of women in public arena and local and global society, media, religion, and culture. The role of women is most often seen in terms of stereotypes and as something insufficiently affirmative, but many of us fight such simplified representations, acting actively, in spite of lots of difficulties, in our public and social space.

### Prof. Svenka Savić



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

She has also written a series of articles on the topic of women in religions during the period from 1997-2009, with a focus on inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue, among others “An Analysis of the Religious Education Textbooks in Serbia”. She has organized numerous panels, workshops, courses dedicated to gender, religion, reconciliations.

## **“If you remain silent at this time...” (Esther 4:14): Christian women speak out.**

### **A reflection-introduction to the theme**

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

The biblical Queen Esther is known for her courageous commitment for the salvation of the Jewish people from extermination. The biblical book is also known for the violent defense or revenge the Jews take on their enemies. Can Esther, a queen from ancient times, be a model for our time and for our life?

Let us have a look at her situation, as the biblical book tells us: Esther lives in the diaspora, far from her original home; she is a member of a minority group within the Persian empire. Nevertheless, Esther's situation is quite comfortable: She lives in peace and obviously also in wealth. Her cousin and guardian Mordecai has no problems in entering the royal court. Esther's personal life is secure and in no way threatened by poverty or violence or anything else. But there is one problematic aspect: Mordecai tells her to keep silent about her origins and her Jewish ethnicity. Thus, Esther does not reveal her identity and nobody knows that she is Jewish. She lives an assimilated life in some way. The Greek version of the book has some additions which affirm that Esther lived according to the prescriptions of the Jewish tradition also in the royal palace.



*Hannah and Ylva (stewards at the IXth GA, in Tinos, Greece)*

But the situation changes: Mordecai comes into conflict with a high official named Haman. Haman does not accept Mordecai's religious attitude and decides to destroy the entire people of the Jews. A particular day for their annihilation is determined by the lot.

Mordecai informs Esther about Haman's decree. What should Esther do? What *can* she do? She is not immediately convinced to speak up for her people. And there is a good reason for that: Whoever appears before the king without being called will be put to death. Only when the king holds out his scepter to this person, he or she will be saved. Esther had not been called for thirty days: So it is

very dangerous for her to go to the king and ask him for the life of her people. The easiest solution would be to keep silent. So, she hopes, she could at least save her own life. But Mordecai makes it plain to Esther that she is also threatened by the decree. Even in the royal palace she will not be safe. Mordecai is convinced that the Jews will be saved anyway – there is an implicit allusion to God here – but Esther has an important personal mission: “For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father’s family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.” (Est 4:14 New Revised Standard Version)

Of course, Esther fears the king’s reaction; she fears for her life. At the moment she is safe in her position at the court. But from Mordecai’s words she realises that this can change every moment. Esther decides to act and to speak out. She leaves her comfortable place in the harem and risks her life for her people. Courage, reasonable and realistic judgment of the situation and (at least according to the Greek version) trust in God guide her action. Esther is the only one who is in the position to speak up for her people. She ceases to think only of her own personal situation and uses her privileged position for the sake of others, for those who are not able to speak for themselves.

What Esther does is very risky and courageous. But it is her task in her particular position at this particular time. She is the only one who can do this; it is her specific duty and she fulfils it. And she is successful: Esther’s intervention saves her people from annihilation.

The story ends with the killing of thousands of opponents. Within the narrative, this motif shows the reversal of the fortunes: The enemies who wanted to kill all Jews are now killed themselves. This part of the story often led to anti-Jewish interpretations of the book. Of course, in our days we cannot accept this sort of violence, even if it is only verbal violence and never really happened. However, the story was written by people in a minority situation whose own existence was often threatened and who were not able to defend themselves. In their imagination they turned the reality round. Therefore, the feast of Purim, which recalls the salvation every year, is a carnival-like celebration: Position are exchanged and the cruel reality can be forgotten for a short time.

According to the book of Esther, her people owe their salvation to the determined action of one woman. She took courage at the right moment, neglected the concern for her own life and spoke out for others who needed her help. In this way, Esther can also be a model for our time and our lives.

*Agneth Siquans,*

*Associate Professor for Old Testament Studies at the University of Vienna*

## EFECW Coordinating Committee meeting

21<sup>st</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> September 2017, Edinburgh, Scotland

The Coordinating Committee (CC) had its meeting 21st-24th September 2017 in Edinburgh, Scotland. We were welcomed at the beautiful Jesuit Gillis Centre. Most of our business sessions took place, however, at Fiona Buchanan's office in the Augustine United Church. God granted us a lovely weather and so getting from the accommodation in the Gillis Centre to the Augustine United Church was a very welcomed opportunity for a nice walk through a park, for a bit of chatting, and breathing-in the atmosphere of the city of Edinburgh.



The main discussion items were continuing preparations for the General Assembly in August 2018 in Soko Grad, Serbia. We made a good progress, having talked about the program, possible keynote speakers, workshops & excursions, invitation letter and registration process, stewards, assembly languages, finances and fundraising (we invite all our members in the national fora if they have additional ideas and tips for fundraising to get in touch with the CC) and many other details that need to be covered.

We were grateful during our planning for meeting with two people who will be with us at the assembly sharing with us their skills and experiences and facilitating the course of the assembly in certain areas: (a) Jo Love from the Iona community will help us make our worship services in Soko Grad beautiful and meaningful for all of us; (b) Vendy Pavlikova (Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe EYCE ExCo & Campaign leader) will be one of the stewards' leaders for the GA.

Saturday evening was reserved for meeting with women from the UK Forum. After time of sharing about news and about joys and challenges in our own contexts all were invited to view the film "[Gardens of Eve](#)". The launching of the film opened with an address by feminist theologian and historian Lesley Orr, followed by discussion.



The CC meeting in Edinburgh also included updates about activities that took place at national and regional levels in recent months, as well as events in which we participated as guests, regular financial updates and updates about JSL projects, Young Women Strategy, and naturally also planning of next tasks, meetings and communication channels. We had a fruitful meeting and are grateful to Fiona for organising the meeting with all the many details in her town so that we were able to work comfortably and enjoy the setting in which we met this time.

*Eva Guldanova, EFECW Co-President*

## Survey: Women in leadership in Churches

### An invitation to participation

In 2013, a group of women leaders in churches and church organisations in Britain came together to consider aspects of leadership. The resulting report was called [The Leading Question](#)? The report contained 7 recommendations. Five years later, we are conducting a survey based on the original recommendations. We hope this will give a picture of women's current experience, their perception of leadership and if things have changed over the past five years.

The recommendations are:

1. To commit to carry out a gender audit of their structures, processes and activities on a regular basis.
2. To encourage and enable the use of liturgical language that is properly sensitive to gender.
3. To identify ways of pro-actively ensuring the presence of women at the highest levels of decision making.
4. To develop mentoring schemes for women.
5. To ensure that there are opportunities for women's stories to be heard in ways that model effectively the strong link between worship and action.
6. To seek out Christian women in leadership positions in secular organisations and ensure that there are opportunities for such experience to influence and challenge church structures.
7. To ensure that there is a framework in place whereby women who experience harassment, bullying and abuse are able to safely disclose and receive protection through suitable processes.

The survey is in English but we have translations of the recommendations in French and German. If you would like these e-mailed, please contact [Anthea Sully](#).

Please complete this survey about Women in Leadership in Churches.

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/K8HVDM5>

We also invite you to encourage all women you know who are in leadership roles in their churches to complete the survey. We would like as many responses as possible!

## “Reformation and Making of Ecclesial Identities”

November 2017, Brussels, Belgium

In November the CEC organised for the members of the TRG, the CEC Governing Board, and invited guests a seminar on the occasion of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation initiated by Martin Luther and his co-workers. This was a second event the CEC organised on this occasion. Invited lecturers from Protestant churches and church fellowships (the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) – the Leuenberg Communion, Lutheran church in Sweden and in GB, EKD), the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church, Orthodox Church (Belarus, Georgia), the Mennonite World Conference, and Pentecostal World Fellowship offered reflections on how their community was influenced by the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation as well as about what has changed in recent decades on our way back to each other, back to unity to which Jesus calls us. The lectures were followed by profound discussions. The participants learned about many signs of hope on the way to unity such as the successful discussions of the CPCE with Vatican on the questions of ministry, episcopate, church, and steps to mutual recognition.

Some of the valuable thoughts and new insights included:

- ② We need each other – within Protestantism Lutherans need Reformed and vice-versa, and we need Orthodox and Catholic point of view to correct, widen and enrich our understanding.
- ② The borders of our churches, the denominational boundaries are not so important, if we focus too much on them we lose sight of the center, they are a temptation to forget the centre – Jesus Christ – which is of absolute importance.
- ② Reform and renewal of the church are directly linked with ecumenical involvement (UR 6).
- ② Luther was a constant invisible guest at the Second Vatican council. 😊
- ② Contribution of reformers for mission was small, but their contribution in terms of insights to understanding Bible was vast ... however without Reformation the eagle of current missionary activity would never reach the current heights.
- ② Ecumenical dialogues and encounters recognized the need for a common reinterpretation of history. New shared memory can free us from the prison of the past. What needs to be liberated is the representation that Catholics make of Mennonites [as an example, but valid for all communities] and vice-versa. – We need give up the negative and hostile images of the other.
- ② Lutheran-Mennonite dialogue called for a “right remembering”: that is re-reading the history of the Reformation in such a way that everyone can recognize himself/herself in the narrative
- ② Ecclesial identity, Christian identity “is radical opening to others,” in other words, it cannot be built “against” others. We need others to receive more fully our own ecclesial identity.

One of the discussions included also sharing of the participants about the fruit of the year of the Reformation anniversary in different countries, contexts, and communities. From the point of view of the Forum we can say that it was a renewed focus on the role of women – in the Reformation as well as today. A lot of valuable new research on this question was done within the last few years in different parts of Europe.



All of the meetings related to the work of the CEC TRG on Ecclesiology and Theological Dialogue were also an occasion to unite in prayer and share spirituality. It is a privilege that at each of them I was entrusted with leading the group in one of the devotions. I shared with the group morning prayer from the PUM (which created an opportunity to share more about the PUM experience 😊), prayers of women from Christian history, and the adaptation of 5 ecumenical commitments the CC used at one of its meetings.

The work of the TRG is theologically very interesting, inspiring and challenging. It is important that it can be enriched by women's perspective coming from our Forum. I find this work important both for the Forum and for the churches and organizations in Europe connected through CEC.

*Eva Guldanova, EFECW Co-President*

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***Please support:***

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

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