



THE
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WORLD
FEDERATION

Department for Planning
and Operations

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A GALLERY OF PORTRAITS: THE WOMEN WHO MADE THE LWF AT ASSEMBLIES

1. Women at the LWF Assembly in Lund, 1947



Where were the women at this historic Assembly in Lund? The year was 1947. The rubble of war was being cleared away and efforts were being made to heal the wounds of war. The LWF was rooted in the former Lutheran World Convention, founded in Eisenach, Germany, five years after the end of the First World War which was primarily a theological discussion group. The Lund Assembly witnessed the birth of the Lutheran World Federation with many fathers and few mothers. Four women were delegates. Two were from the former United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA): **Sister Anna Ebert und Dr Nona Diehl with Ms and Dr Aasgaard in the middle in the picture** (right picture). Out of the 178 delegates, this represents 2,8% of the total delegations. It should be noted also that a small number of women were invited as visitors for this first Assembly: 2 from Czechoslovakia, 10 from Denmark, 2 from Iceland, 3 from India (Ms H. John on the left picture), 2 from Norway and 1 from Poland. Although the visitors had no official vote at the Assembly, the presence of these additional 20 women must have had some impact on the Assembly to follow. For the stories of Ms Nona Diehl and Sister Anna Ebert, read at www/LWF/DTPW/WICAS/HerStory. At Lund, Sweden, the Executive Committee consisted of 15 members : one Dane, one Finn, one Swede, four Germans, four North Americans, and four additional member of other counties. Delegates from member churches were allotted as follows: Denmark:10, Finland: 10, Germany: 40, Iceland: 5, Norway: 10, Sweden: 10, North America: 40 and other countries 5 each, women were appointed delegates in the biggest delegation and on the participants list, there are the last. (Texts from the WICAS book: *The continuing journey: women's participation in the LWF, 1992*)

2. Women at the LWF Assembly in Hanover, 1952



The world of 1952 was still a time of refuge. The 13 women delegates at the LWF Hannover Assembly had come together to meet some very specific needs. They focused on post-war women and concentrated on topics as discussed in the Study Document for Section VI: “Home and Family”, the “Question of birth control, “Women in public life” and “What does the Bible say about men and women?”. Women came together to discuss what seemed to be their ever increasing estrangement from the Church at a time when new challenges to religion were being posed by the rise of communism. In an article of the Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church (Augsburg, 1965), Nora Diehl (a delegate at Lund LWF Assembly), Dorothy Haas (a delegate at Minneapolis LWF Assembly, 1957) and Liselotte Nold wrote how since about 1950, most interesting and exciting events have occurred in women’s organisations in the local congregations in America and all over the world. The second World War proved that women in many countries were capable of doing “men’s work” having entered the workforce to support their families while the men were at the front. In countries that suffered so much destruction, loss of life and economic dislocation, women found a strength they never before know they possessed. The women at Hannover know that something was not quite right about being placed in a separate section. They realized that they had strength and gifts that could touch every part of the church’s life. A recommendation was placed for being involved in all parts and on all commissions of the LWF. A new LWF Commission was indeed formed and called “the Commission on Stewardship and Congregational Life”. 3 women were appointed: Dr Antonie Nopitsch (Germany), Mrs Minerva Irene Baker (USA) and Miss Oddrun Karstad (Norway). At Hannover, women were seen as a “sociological division” and not as part of the “Living Word in a Responsible Church”. 24 years later at Evian, women will be recognized officially for their importance as part of the New Community in Christ”. At Hannover, **Eva Benedictine Lyngby**, born in Aarhus, Denmark in 1898 was elected First woman to the LWF Executive Committee (on the right in the picture), for her story, read at www/LWF/DTPW/WICAS/HerStory. Sister Eva Lyngby from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark was a deaconess who had trained as a nurse. In 1947, she was elected to the governing board of the International Federation of Deaconesses Work in Utrecht and served the LWF governance from 1952 to 1957. Sister Mildred Winter was another delegate to the Second LWF Assembly, serving as executive secretary of the Board of Deaconesses to the United Lutheran Church in America. Texts from the WICAS book: *The continuing journey: women’s participation in the LWF, 1992*)

3. Women at the LWF Assembly in Minneapolis, 1957



The world of 1957 was “a world of new nations and cold war”. 18 women were appointed delegates among 255 men, representing only 17% of the total delegation. Lutheran women from all over the world participated actively in the Assembly and welcomed the first young woman delegate from the South: **Maria von Reiswitz from the Deutsche Evangelische Kirche in Chile, she was only 23 (second from the left on the picture)**. For her story, read at www/LWF/DTPW/WICAS/HerStory. A specificity of Minneapolis is the fund-raising undertaken by American women to invite as visitors many women from the other part of the world. Mrs Minerva Baker was referred to in her capacity of having “introduced the women guests who has come to the Assembly invited by the women in America”. Despite the lack of acknowledgment given to women in the official documents of the third Assembly, women offered a powerful presence. Side-events were organised and a special interest group on “women’s leadership luncheon” has more than 1300 participants! Women were hungry for participation and discovered ways to come together despite their exclusion. The LWF committee on women’s work made following recommendation: “that the Commission on Stewardship and Congregational Life asks the Executive Committee to recommend that the national committees seriously consider the appointment of women in all future commissions (theology, education, Lutheran World Service, mission and stewardship”.

(Texts from the WICAS book: *The continuing journey: women’s participation in the LWF, 1992*)

4. Women at the LWF Assembly in Helsinki, 1963

In July 1963, a Women's pre-assembly conference was held in Schmalensee (Germany). The conference, entitled "Christian Women Today", had representatives from 22 countries. They were mainly delegates and official visitors appointed member churches to participate in the Helsinki Assembly scheduled for 1963. Financial support for this gathering came mostly from women's organizations in North America, but resources from a number of women's groups were offered. According to Gudrun Diestel, for her story, read at www/LWF/DTPW/WICAS/HerStory, "the American women has the money, and the Germans were very poor, but we gave what we had. We had very good methods of Bible study, and having gone through the Nazi experience, we had some very strong lay leadership. We know the power of the Bible in times of persecution and resistance. So together, we made up the programme". There were indeed, resources being shared in putting together the programme at Schmalensee but the LWF did not provide any financial resources for this meeting, and no LWF executive staff members attended. The list of participants was exciting in its diversity but we were still learning about what it meant to be an inclusive organization. Insight into the situation was provided by Gudrun Diestel, who helped organize the women's pre-conference meeting: "What developed quickly in those days was a growing knowledge of other continents – Asia, Africa, South America. It was a time when people were still working under the concept of "younger churches". What happened was that the Northern Hemisphere made up the programme so that we would have people from other countries make presentations. We had women represented from all over the world and these same women were invited to the LWF Assembly in Helsinki. The focus of this meeting was stewardship. Women brought a new understanding to the concept of stewardship in the church. Women know that stewardship included the appropriate use of one's gifts as well as the opportunity to use those gifts. This was not so different from the cry of the women at Hannover "that women be given the opportunity to contribute to every sphere of work of the LWF. What was new was the realization of how important it was for women to come together. The appointment of three women to one Commission was simply not enough. The voices of women needed to be heard in every part of the LWF. One woman had the opportunity to be part of the LWF staff: Christa Held. For her story, read at www/LWF/DTPW/WICAS/HerStory.

The theme of the Fourth LWF General Assembly held in Helsinki was "Christ Today". What was the today of 1963? It was a world that had narrowly escaped US-Soviet nuclear confrontation. It was a world of political unrest. The story of women at Helsinki was difficult to construct. The Findings Committee of the Women's pre-assembly conference presented a report on the events at Schmalensee which included a summary of women's work in the LWF from Hannover to Helsinki. The result of these findings was the formation of the Continuation Committee on women's work. The nomination of the Continuation Committee took place in 1965, after the appointment of the Committee members, an additional year and a half went by before the Committee began to function and met first in Geneva in 1966 and in Lund in 1969. Discussions focused on women's position and responsibility in the church, the family and changing society. They decided to bring to the Executive Committee the suggestion to hold a pre-assembly conference in Porto Alegre with the theme: "Sent to the world: the challenge to women in a changing society" with the request for 100 rather than 50 participants. (More in the WICAS book: *The continuing journey: women's participation in the LWF, 1992*)

5. Women at the LWF Assembly in Evian, 1970



As Zeitgeist: the wounds of the Second World War were healing and despite the East-West tensions, Europe had managed to avoid hostilities. Regional conflicts flared, however and the decolonization process was not yet complete. For the first time a pre-assembly Women Conference took place in Bastad, Sweden in 1969, attended by 40 women from the LWF member churches in Asia and the Pacific, Africa, Europe and the Americas. There were also a number of women representing churches other than the Lutheran Church. This was the time of the women's liberation movement. The LWF General secretary Rev. Dr André Appel addressed the pre-assembly conference. This was the first time a member of the executive staff in Geneva had been present at an LWF international women's conference. This meeting took place shortly after the Swedish Church had decided to ordain women. New strong words were beginning to creep into the vocabulary of the women in the LWF, like policy, planning and decision-making. Representation of women at the Evian Assembly was however small. The 122 women delegates appointed accounted for only 9,6% of the total Assembly participation. Despite their small numbers, the recommendation made by the women who had met at Bastad to have a woman staff person representing them in Geneva was adopted at Evian. This resulted in the establishment of the Women's desk of the LWF. It would not be until two years later, however that the Rev. Eva Zabolai-Csekme would assume responsibilities for the staff position. For her story, read at www/LWF/DTPW/WICAS/HerStory. Only one woman was appointed to the Executive Committee: **Ms Bodill Soelling, from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark** as you can see her on the picture of the 1970-1977 LWF Executive Committee. For the story of Bodill Soelling, read at www/LWF/DTPW/WICAS/HerStory (Texts from the WICAS book: *The continuing journey: women's participation in the LWF, 1992*)

6. Women at the LWF Assembly in Dar Es Salaam, 1977



Women realized “now they do have lots of things together – why not later on?”

. In an article in *Lutheran World* written by Kathleen Hurty, a US delegate to the Assembly, she described: “The invisibility of women in the LWF Assemblies in language and worship and decision-making was altered slightly at Dar Es Salaam. Visions of a new community of women and men in authentic partnership expanded into tentative clarity with the election of six women to the LWF Executive Committee. It is a hopeful beginning. Being a woman at the Assembly was a bit like being a twist of lime in a glass of tonic water. We were distinctly visible, we affected the flavour, but we were hardly an equal part of the drink. How seriously full partnership of men and women in all areas of church life will be taken was a necessary question for the LWF. Of the 250 delegates, 55 were women, 22%. The women elected to the 30 member Executive Committee were: Dorothy Marple (US), Fibi Nadah (Nigeria), Rev. Annette Nuber (Federal Republic of Germany), Bodil Solling (Denmark), Bondu V. Subbamma (India) and Rev. Audur Vilhjalmsdottir (Iceland). Representation of women in the various commissions and committees also grew and one woman: Gudrun Diestel was elected as chairperson of the Commission on World Service. Representation of women on the various commissions and committees grew. From the Dar Es Salaam Assembly onwards, the Women’s desk became known as the Office of Women in Church and Society, or WICAS.

(Texts from the WICAS book: *The continuing journey: women’s participation in the LWF, 1992*)

7. Women at the LWF Assembly in Budapest, 1984



Consistently mentioned as a high priority was the need for leadership development. Between 1977 and 1984 a number of regional consultations also took place with the purpose of enhancing opportunities for exchange, learning and sharing within the world regions. Five major consultations were held in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. Regional consultants were appointed: Nancy Y. C. Chow from Hong Kong, Bondu V. Subbama from India, Eva Jorkey from Liberia, Kaanaeli Makundi from Tanzania and Rosalind Daniel from Malaysia. From 1978 to 1984, WICAS entered a phase of stabilization and expansion with priorities such as networking, leadership training and biblical and theological study. At Budapest, 32% of the delegates were women. Resolutions were adopted affirming the theological basis for full participation of women in the life of the church and society. Women were getting closer to the ideal of full participation but there was yet a way to go therefore they demonstrated for greater participation and visibility in the LWF Assembly **(on the picture Marthe Ahmadou and others demonstrating on the podium)**. After the demonstration, two women were asked to chair sessions and at the end of the Assembly, 3 women were appointed as chairpersons of commissions (Christina Berglund: Studies, Dorothy Marple: Church Cooperation and Ruth Abraham: Communication). 7 women were elected at the LWF Executive Committee: Maria Gomez, Aida Haddad, Sieghilde Hoerschelmann, Lois Leffler, Käte Mahn, Christina Rogestam and Susana Telewoda. For the story of Ms Marthe Ahmadou, Susana Telewoda, read at www/LWF/DTPW/WICAS/HerStory who was elected as vice-president for Africa. In 1987, Aida Haddad from Palestine became the second women LWF vice-president. For the story of Ms Aida Haddad, read at www/LWF/DTPW/WICAS/HerStory. (Texts from the WICAS book: *The continuing journey: women's participation in the LWF*, 1992)

8. Women at the LWF Assembly in Curitiba, 1990



Between at the Seventh and the Eighth General Assembly, it became a priority of the Advisory Committee to work towards making the goal of 40% representation of women a reality. The Advisory Committee sought to ensure that the recommendations of Budapest were carried out. The Assembly, whose theme “I have heard the cry of my people” was based on an expression first found in the Book of Exodus, satisfied the recommendation set forth by the Seventh Assembly concerning the representation of women. Forty three percent of the delegates were women. And women comprised more than 40% of the decision making body of the Federation. It was no longer difficult to find women’s names among the main presenters and speakers in the Assembly; half of the allocated speaker were filled by women. In addition to the 43% of the delegates many other women attended as visitors. The Brazilian women provided a great deal of hospitality for Assembly delegates. In Curitiba, the women of the Lutheran churches made a conscious shift in assessing their participation. They began to ask whether their presence at the Assembly would make a difference and whether presence means participation. They began to analyse the impact of their presence and the long term commitment of the LWF and its member churches to issues affecting them in the life of the church. In Curitiba, Martina Huhn from Germany and Sophia Tung from Taiwan were appointed as vice-presidents. Christina Rogestam from Sweden was appointed treasurer. Seventeen women were appointed to serve on the Council and Executive Committee. Prasanna Samuel from India was appointed chairperson of the newly-formed Programme for Theology and Studies. (Texts from the WICAS book: *The continuing journey: women’s participation in the LWF, 1992*)

9. Women at the LWF Assembly in Hong Kong, 1997



The picture portrays beautifully women and the Eucharistic ministry. By the Hong Kong Assembly, many more churches had been ordaining women. The Assembly in Hong Kong introduced the concept of Gender: Men and women: gender and the theology of the churches. Women in Eucharistic ministry. What does it mean to be male or female, this question of gender receives different answers in different societies. In Christ we are a new creation (2Cor. 5:17). This new creation is celebrated most profoundly in the Holy Communion where we all gather at the one table, without distinction or rank, to receive the body and blood of Christ in order to be the body of Christ in the world. To speak about gender from a biblical and theological perspective leads us to affirm that our faith in the triune God calls us to acts of justice in these relationships, including equal regard for one another as men and women, the sharing of power and service, the recognition of gifts and establishment of structures which are accessible and hospitable to all of God's people. The issues faced at Hong Kong were: leadership, feminist theology, ordination of women, partnership, family, human sexuality. First woman LWF vice-president for Asia: Rev. Dr Prasanna Kumari from the Arcot Lutheran Church and Ms Parmata Ishaya from the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria was also elected vice-president for Africa. (*From the LWF Assembly Report Hong Kong, 1997*)

10. Women at the LWF Assembly in Winnipeg, 2003



The message of the Winnipeg Assembly stated that “many churches still do not ordain women and/or keep women from participating fully in decision making processes. Often patriarchy plays a dominant role, legitimized by culture and religion. Therefore the Assembly delegates committed themselves to call on member churches to facilitate dialog within the communion on areas of disagreement such as the understandings and practices of the ministry, involving both men and women both ordained and lay, in a spirit of mutual respect and quest of common understandings. The delegates also committed to promote the full inclusion of women and youth in all aspects of the life and work as churches and in the societies. *(For the Healing of the World, LWF Official report, p 51-52)*

11. Women at the LWF Assembly in Stuttgart, 2010



The Assembly elected the following persons as Vice-Presidents of the Lutheran World Federation and witness for the first time the quota of women exceeding 50%:

Ms Eun-Hae KWON, Republic of Korea, Asia (elect)

Bishop Alex MALASUSA, Tanzania, Africa

Bishop Helga HAUGLAND BYFUGLIEN, Norway, Nordic Countries

Bishop Dr Frank JULY, Germany, Central Western Europe

Bishop Tamás FABINY, Hungary, Central Eastern Europe

Rev. Dr Gloria ROJAS VARGAS, Chile, Latin America & the Caribbean

Bishop Susan JOHNSON, Canada, North America (elect)

Ms Anna-Maria TETZLAFF, Germany, Central Western Europe

Ms Colleen Elizabeth CUNNINGHAM, South Africa, Africa

i.e. 6 women and 5 men as full members of the Executive Committee from 31 July 2011.

In the Gender Justice Policy, on page 6, one can read the **resolution on gender justice**: “We call on the Assembly to urge member churches to re-commit to genuine, practical and effective implementation of LWF policies and decisions regarding the full participation of women in the life of the church – and of the LWF Communion – as well as in society. We call on member churches to set appropriate legislation and regulatory policies that enable and ensure women in leadership positions – ordained and lay – and the opportunities to pursue theological education. We ask that churches who do not ordain women prayerfully consider the effect that inaction and refusal on this matter has on those who are precluded from exercising their God-given calling because they are women. The pain of exclusion and the loss of God-given gifts are experienced by the whole church. We call on member churches and the LWF Secretariat to include gender analyses, as biblical and theological tools, in all aspects of the life of member churches in the communion, including diaconal and advocacy work. We ask for a clear action plan for the development of contextualized gender policies that may be implemented on all levels in the member churches and be mandatory for the LWF secretariat. We call on the Council to develop and approve such a guiding process. We call for the support of women leaders, lay and ordained, particularly women bishops and presidents, as vital members of the communion. We call for the LWF and its member churches to make a clear stand against domestic violence, acknowledging every person’s right to feel safe and respectfully treated, also when in their own homes. We ask the Council to have the issue of gender justice as a standing item on its agenda.”

