

2020/2021

# OUR VOICES

ems women's network



ENGLISH

## WOMEN'S STRENGTH IN TIMES OF CRISIS



Evangelical Mission in Solidarity

<b>Editorial</b> <i>Gabriel Mayer</i> .....	3
<b>Indonesia</b> <i>Lidya Tandirerung</i> ...as the president at STT INTIM in times of Covid-19 .....	4
<b>Japan</b> <i>Asao Mochizuki</i> ...as liaison woman in Japan .....	6
...as a survivor of leprosy – spreading hope	
<b>Ghana</b> <i>Rebecca Abladey Dowuona</i> ...as a woman of 100 – praying in the midst of crisis .....	7
<b>India</b> <i>Jasmine Alley</i> ...as the new liaison woman – shouldering responsibility .....	8
<b>Simbabwe</b> <i>Andrea Wöllenstein</i> ...World Day of Prayer – Women supporting women in Simbabwe .....	10
<b>Simbabwe</b> <i>Emma Mahlunge</i> ...as a social worker – against precarious life conditions .....	12
<b>South Korea</b> <i>Dr OH Hyun Sun</i> ...as religious education scholar – standing up for diversity .....	13
<b>Lebanon</b> <i>Rima Nasrallah</i> ...as a blind woman – struggling for self-reliance .....	14
<b>Lebanon</b> <i>Najla</i> ...as a survivor of domestic violence .....	15
<b>From Africa</b> <i>Prof. Musa Dube</i> Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians hear the cry “Mama – I cannot breathe!” .....	16
<b>South Africa</b> <i>Judith Kotzé</i> ...as “privileged women” – mourning and standing up for justice .....	18
<b>South Africa</b> <i>Anda Nkosi</i> ...as responsible woman for health stations .....	20
<b>South Africa</b> <i>Buyiswa Sambane</i> ...as a teacher – supporting girls in a violent environment .....	22
<b>Germany</b> <i>Angelika Maschke</i> ...as a pastor – facing conflicts over unintentional pregnancies .....	24
<b>Chile</b> <i>Josefina Hurtado Neira</i> ...embroidering women becoming political activists .....	26
<b>Cameroon</b> ...as project coordinator – educating internally displaced people .....	28
...with SHALOM Initiative – supporting internally displaced people .....	29
<b>...Reading the Bible and discovering new perspectives</b> 15 years of intercultural Reading the Bible .....	30

**Dear women,  
dear sisters in the International EMS Women's Network,**

this year, due to corona, the new issue of OUR VOICES comes a little later than usual under the title:

### **"Women's strength in times of crisis"**

We started looking for material long before the headlines about Corona and Black Lives Matter flooded our news. And this issue has become an extensive one: All our liaison women report from their countries about women who, despite violence, poverty, a handicapping society and Covid-19, hold on to their will to survive, to win independence, to live their solidarity as World Day of Prayer women and to continue on their educational mission by raising their voices loudly and breaking new ground.

In last year's issue of OUR VOICES we dealt in detail with the development of the new EMS Code of Conduct on the prevention of sexual harassment. Now we hope for the effective adoption of the implementation steps agreed upon such as ombudspersons, contact and advice centres and training measures in individual EMS member churches.

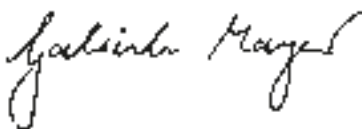
Against the background of current travel restrictions, the Women's Conference in November 2020 will unfortunately have to take place virtually in the run-up to the EMS General Assembly. Video conferences with EMS liaison women and the EMS women's advisory board during the last months were a good way of staying in contact and strengthening the worldwide bond of women who *are all in the same storm but are in very different boats*.

### **Farewell**

At this point, Gabriele Mayer and Bärbel Wuthe say goodbye to the EMS women and gender work going into retirement. It is not easy for either of us to leave after so many years of working together on women's and gender issues. OUR VOICES - as a visible expression of our International Women's Network - was a core element of our work. This fellowship has also been a great gift to our lives. We would like to thank our readers, authors, EMS women's networkers and all those involved in programmes and projects. May the Divine continue to bless you abundantly and keep you protected from harm.

*Breathing. Exhale, inhale, move on.*

Best wishes from Stuttgart



Dr. Gabriele Mayer  
EMS Women and Gender Desk  
International Women's Network

October 2020



*...with the great wish: May God's justice become more visible in the disparities of our world.*

# ...as the President of STT INTIM – Campus in times of Covid-19

by Rev. Dr Lidya K. Tandirerung, newly elected President of Theological Seminary for Eastern Indonesia-Makkassar and EMS Liaison Woman of the nine Indonesian EMS member churches



Lidya K. Tandirerung

There is a saying, *"we are in the middle of the same storm but not in the same boat"*.

Even though the level of its impact is different, but we are facing the same storm. Sadness of losing pastor colleagues, ministry activists and close family members, brought me emotionally but also theologically to God who suffered with humanity. However, I am also grateful for those who have survived and recovered. We are facing an unprecedented situation, but we

There were two major religious holidays coinciding with this pandemic. The first was Easter and the second is Eid ul-Fitr. The situation urged churches to design creatively online forms of worship including theological questions around the validity of online services of the Holy Communion. We reflected on the virtual body of Christ, being reflected amidst the many separations that this pandemic causes in various forms. Celebrating the service of Holy Communion online was a new spiritual experience for the congregation.

support each other as God's agents for the mission of restoration.

At the seminary STT INTIM, we paid extra attention how to maintain the "quarantine" for 250 students living in dormitories, as well as around 150 students living in rented houses around the campus. We formed a Task Force on campus to garner specific support for their daily needs. Parents struggled to support their children financially because they also experienced the serious effects of this pandemic. Many parties were mobilized to help, for both daily food materials and items such as masks, hand sanitizers, antiseptic soaps, spraying of disinfectant on campus.

In the midst of this heavy struggle, our campus initiated sharing with small traders around the campus directly affected by the closing of the campus. At the end of April, government instructions led to send students back to their hometowns. For those who cannot go home, we support the necessities of daily living needs. At the same time, academically as Seminary we must support online learning. I am thankful that this went well despite the hard work that it requires from teaching staff. Our students are in various regions with various access to internet connection. Some of them have to walk a long way to find places where they can connect with the campus and with us for online lectures.



Campus Chapel



In May, for our Muslim sisters and brothers the celebration of Eid ul-Fitr took place. In Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, people care for a tradition called "mudik", homecoming. In this time of Covid-19, we worried about millions of people leaving the cities as centers of the pandemic (red zones) and moving to their hometowns possibly causing large transmission of Covid-19. Our government suppressed this homecoming and prohibited crossing district boundaries. We continue to pray for wisdom for our government and society to manage this situation, and for us Indonesians to become more disciplined and cooperative in improving this situation. The Synod office or initiatives of local congregations organized transmittance of church services, especially Sunday Services via live streaming. All religious communities in Indonesia, including Friday prayers for Muslims, also do this. It seems that the congregations increasingly understand that as church we remain a fully "koinonia" when staying at home for the sake of breaking the chain of distribution of Covid-19. Churches continue to improve theological understanding that churching at home does not diminish the meaning of our fellowship, until the situation to return to church is conducive.

There are many initiatives from specifically women's community and churchwomen's fellowship in various creative forms. For example, making and distributing masks, distributing groceries, and helping to provide self-protection clothing for the medical team who are at the forefront of this battle and to involve as volunteers. These initiatives have been taken impressively by women's fellowship in the circle of EMS member churches in Indonesia. There is awareness on a national level that the most vulnerable groups affected by the pandemic are women and children. I just got involved in a national workshop conducted by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection of the Republic of Indonesia. The topic was to strategically create psychosocial support for women and children who are vulnerable to violence both domestic and in public.

Economic pressures exposed many women to stress and depression in their struggle to manage family survival. We affirmed and seriously call for the role of religious leaders to pay extra attention to vulnerable groups with more psychosocial and diaconal support.



*Dormitory for students*



## ...as Liaison Woman in Japan

**Beginning of June Rev. Asao Mochizuki sent the following mail:**

*Greetings from Japan!*

*COVID-19 has strong negative impacts on Japanese politics and economy. Financial support for companies and people is made conditional. The wealth of some rich people is prioritized over the people. The subsidy has reached only 2% of the people, and the two masks that have finally arrived were defective. Many churches in Japan, especially in urban areas,*

*were forced to close from March to May. Many of them deliver worship online, but have a smaller audience than at the beginning.*

*The basics for the church... gathering and worshipping together with congregation members are now being challenged.*

## ...spreading hope as a leprosy survivor

**"Cherry Blossoms and Red Beans" is a Japanese film by Naomi Kawase from 2015, based on the novel of the same name by Durian Sukegawa.**

**The film had its premiere at the Cannes International Film Festival 2015.**



Sentaro is released from prison and returns to his little snack bar in Tokyo where Dorayaki pancakes are sold. These are filled with sweet red bean paste. One day the old lady Tokue stands in front of his shop and spontaneously applies for the advertised temporary job.

At first, he refuses. Finally, he tries her homemade bean paste and is so impressed by it that he hires her. The news of the new delicacy quickly makes the rounds, and soon there are long queues of customers wanting to buy it. A special friendship develops between Sentaro and Tokue. Then one day the customers stop coming. The rumor had spread that Tokue was a leper. The background to this is the Japanese Leprosy Prevention Law, in force from 1953 to 1996, which made it possible to compulsorily place infected persons in closed institutions. Tokue was also forcibly committed at the age of 20, was not allowed to keep her child and lived for decades in a leprosy colony.

Nevertheless, she had developed a zest for life and an awareness of nature - the cherry blossoms, the clouds, the rays of the sun - to the extent that while in an almost mystical moment preparing bean paste, she heard the beans tell her their story and she felt so rich.

A few months later Tokue dies of pneumonia. She leaves Sentaro her equipment for making the bean paste as well as an audio cassette with a message she had recorded for Sentaro: that he reminded her of her son and that the value of a person is not in his career but rather in his ability to perceive the beauty of the world despite all adversities.

A very slow and touching film!

*Gabriele Mayer*

# ...as a woman of 100 years —praying during the crisis

Rev. Rebecca Abladey, EMS Liaison Woman in the Presbyterian Church in Ghana, introduces Mama Sophia:



Mama Sophia

Pastoring at the Ascension congregation in Adabraka of Accra, I was acquainted with Mama Sophia Welberck, a 100-year-old woman. While visiting her in her home she shared the following beliefs and theological reflections on Covid-19 and the implemented lockdown:

*"The Almighty God uses His Power in His Mercy to create Lockdown for His children when situations are not favourable. God applies Lockdown to save. He teaches, admonishes, encourages, protects, releases innovation. God reveals himself in diverse ways and draws people to himself...."*

*monishes, encourages, protects, releases innovation. God reveals himself in diverse ways and draws people to himself...."*

Mama Sophia was very engaged in the congregational discussion and said that the God who locked down Noah in the ark later opened the ark for him. In my contribution as pastor, I added that God has always been present and attentive to His people. From the Wilderness, He provided the manna, quail water and protection. God led as the pillar of fire and cloud. In exile, God sent Daniel, Ezra, Esther and others. Today, you and I are those God is working with, through diverse ways and means to show forth His glory.

If the early Church history recorded lockdown due to persecutions but remained steadfast, then Christians of today and women in solidarity ought to be very vibrant, faithful and steadfast in the service of the Lord. May EMS stand tall and strong in Jesus name. Amen.

Mama Sophia was born on the 1st April 1920. She is a Game, hailed from Gbese, a suburb of Accra. She stayed with an auntie, a trader, around Tudu in Accra central. She got a formal education in the Elementary school. As she developed interest in trading, she joined the business and learned home economics, mastering in baking.

Mama Sophia raised nine children, six females and three males. Six of her children were already called to eternity. Today Mama Sophia has six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. Mama Sophia loves sharing the word of God and is very prayerful to date. She shared that her high age is fuelled by the studying, practicing the word of God and prayer. "My secret is Prayer".

Mama Sophia is cared for by her two daughters, Henrietta and Dinah and assisted by their children as well as other loved ones. The church plays her part with periodic visitation.

<b>A</b> AVOID CROWD	<b>B</b> BEWARE OF FAKE NEWS	<b>C</b> CLEAN YOUR HANDS	<b>D</b> DON'T GO OUT	<b>E</b> EMPTY THE STREETS
<b>G</b> GATHERING IS BAD	<b>H</b> HAND SANITIZING	<b>I</b> INSIDE THE HOME	<b>J</b> JOIN FIGHT AGAINST CORONA	<b>K</b> KIND TO THE NEEDY
<b>L</b> LOVE YOUR FAMILY	<b>M</b> MEDITATE DAILY	<b>N</b> NO TO HANDSHAKES	<b>O</b> OFFER HELP TO EACH OTHER	<b>P</b> PRACTICE YOUR PASSION
<b>Q</b> QUARANTINE YOURSELF	<b>R</b> REGULAR EXERCISING	<b>S</b> SOCIAL DISTANCING	<b>T</b> TRAVELING IS DANGEROUS	<b>U</b> USE MASKS
<b>V</b> VISIT YOUR DOCTOR ONLINE	<b>W</b> WEAPONIZED IMMUNE SYSTEM	<b>X</b> XTRA PRECAUTIONS FOR ELDERLY	<b>Y</b> YOUR AWARENESS IS A PREVENTION	<b>Z</b> ZERO FACE TOUCHING

Source unknown

## ...as new EMS Liaison Woman – shouldering responsibility

**Theologian Dr Jasmine Alley was appointed General Secretary of Church of South India (CSI) Women's Fellowship in June 2019.**

My name is Ms. Jasmine Alley the daughter of Late Rev. N. Joseph & Mrs. T. Anlet Mercy and granddaughter of Late. Rev. J. Nallathampy.

I have three siblings, two of them are presbyters. I belong to CSI South Kerala Diocese, Trivandrum, Kerala, India. In acceptance of the special call of God, I have dedicated myself to do His ministry as a full time servant. Therefore, after the completion of my post-graduation from the Kerala University, I did my Theological Studies under the Senate of Serampore University.

After the completion of my Theological Studies I have been working under CSI South Kerala Diocese for many years in various posts such as Project Officer of Diaconal Ministry, Chaplain in SMCSI Medical College Karakonam, in the women's fellowship and as a lecturer at different Theological Institutes.

By God's grace, in June 2019, I was appointed as the General Secretary of CSI Women's Fellowship. Throughout my life journey, I have been experiencing the divine guidance and protection of God in a wonderful way.



Dr. Jasmine Alley

### News via WhatsApp in July 2020:

*Though in Bangalore, rates are increasing and the area is still in lockdown and people are struggling a lot, by God's grace, we are safe. In Vishranthi, we all are doing well and have sufficient food also but finding difficult to pay the salaries. Praying for that one.*



Banana plants on the premises of Vishranthi Nilayam



**Devotion during Passion Week  
on St. Mathew 22:15-22**

The Pharisees sent their disciples to question Jesus. The questioners begin with a bit of flattery or we can say it as a psychological approach (V.16)

"Teacher, you are a man of integrity and you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth."  
There is an irony here because they intend only to "butter Jesus up". Actually, their aim is to destroy Jesus' influence by either discrediting him in the presence of crowds or causing him to make a misstep that will get him in trouble with the Romans.

However, in fact what they told about Jesus is true (V17). Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Jesus realized their wickedness and answered wisely. He asked whose image is there in the coin. They answered it is Caesar's. Then he said:

*"Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."*

Moreover, Jesus called them 'hypocrites' (V18) because they show something from outside (flattery) that is quite opposite of what is true internally. Jesus taught them to obey God and at same time to obey the rules of the nation. From this, let us examine ourselves:

*Are we bearing the icon (image) of the crucified Christ or not?  
Are we honest with others and with God or flattering?*

We can humble ourselves before God. We do not know when we will get through the pandemic, but I know through Christ we will overcome this crisis. Therefore, with faith we can sing, "We shall overcome...one day." Every Cross flowers with new life, every tomb is a workshop of resurrection, and every Holy week is the raw material for a new creation.

Prayer:

"Parent God of compassion and love thank you for this holy week. Let us to be the icon of the crucified Christ and in this fearful situation we need your wisdom to address delicate issues of church and state. Thank you for giving us the confidence that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. "



## ...World Day of Prayer – Women supporting women in Zimbabwe

**Rev. Andrea Wöllenstein, EMS Women's Advisory Board and Chairperson of the Christian Education Fund of the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck.**

*"Rise! Take Your Mat and Walk!"* that is what the women from Zimbabwe called out to us at the World Day of Prayer in March 2020. Rising, getting on your feet and taking one's life into one's hands. Rise, get out of your comfort zone and stand up for justice - this is what the WDP service and the solidarity in prayer around the globe encouraged us to do!

It was the last big event for us in Germany before the lockdown due to the Corona pandemic started. Rise, yes - but stay at home. Pray - but in the quiet closet. What we experience as a massive intervention in our lives is a catastrophe for people in the poor countries of the world.

*"The situation has made the country unlivable. We just don't know what to do",* wrote Dr Emmie Wade from Harare before Easter. "For 21 days, all public life is to be locked down. The borders are closed, as well as all schools, restaurants, offices and recreation areas. People are to be kept off the streets. There is a threat of famine, because Zimbabwe lives from people buying or selling their products at the market or on the streets. They cannot afford to stay at home. Not even for one day."

Emmie Wade heads the "Kunzwana Women's Association" (<http://www.kunzwana.co.zw/>), a non-governmental organisation that works with women in rural areas. I met her in 1998, on the fringes of the World Council of Churches Assembly in Harare. We have been in touch since then. Kunzwana has built a broad network among women in rural areas. 6.560 women are members and can attend courses in more than 22 different areas. From chicken farming to health care, basket weaving, sewing, vegetable growing, soap and sanitary towel production and much more. Through the "Ausbildungshilfe/ Christian Education Fund" ([www.ausbildungshilfe.de](http://www.ausbildungshilfe.de)), the small relief organization of our regional church, we support Kunzwana in the education and promotion of young girls, many of whom are AIDS orphans.

*"Give us compassion and the willingness to help those who are suffering",* we prayed at the World Day of Prayer. Thus, I wrote a letter to the World Day of Prayer women in my region with the title: "Easter eggs for Zimbabwe" and asked for donations. The response was overwhelming: To date, over 13.000 Euros were received on our donations account of the "Christian Education Fund"!



Seamstress

Already before Easter, we transferred a first amount. From this the women bought fabrics for masks, which they gave away to needy people or sold to others to have an income. We transfer the money to an account in England. This ensures that the horrendous fees are not deducted, which are currently common in Zimbabwe.



Headdress matching the mask

Further funds are intended for the construction of water cisterns for watering the gardens and for school meals. Even before Corona lockdown, the effects of food shortages due to the drought were clearly felt. Now more than 500 children come every day for a warm meal. "People here are not afraid of Corona," writes Emmie Wade, "they're hungry!"

The ideas for "fundraising activities" of our WDP women were manifold: Young girls made music on the market place. Women sewed masks and gave them away in exchange for a donation to Zimbabwe. Others forwarded my appeal for donations, so that the circle of supporters has become wider. When many people participate, even the smallest amounts help. Therefore, it is true that this difficult time not only separates us from each other, but also strengthens cohesion and solidarity.



*School premises*



*School children receive urgently needed meals*

## ...as a social worker – against precarious life conditions

**Rev. Andrea Wöllenstein represents the Women's work of the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck at EMS Women's Advisory Board**



*Emma Mahlunge*

Emma Mahlunge was born in Rhodesia in 1937 and grew up in a family of agricultural workers. Her mother died when she was three years old. Her father, who worked as a gardener for white missionaries in Apartheid Rhodesia, encouraged and supported his six daughters to go to school.

After her marriage, she was not allowed to continue working. Those were the laws. Convinced that women must be able to take care of themselves, she opened her home to women's groups and trained them in a variety

of skills. By 1965 her work had become so well-known that various companies wanted to sell their products on the African market.

After independence in 1980, she further qualified with a degree and diploma in social work. As a social worker she then became acquainted with the catastrophic living conditions of women on commercial farms. Without school and professional training, they were completely subordinated to their husbands. Many suffered from gender-specific violence and unjust inheritance laws.

Emma Mahlunge has made the situation of these women public and the legislators aware of the unjust conditions. As a result, the legal discrimination against women was gradually abolished.

A new challenge was posed by the government's land reform, which expropriated the white owners of the commercial farms. Many of them left the country. More than two million farm workers became unemployed. With their families, they were driven from their homes and did not know where to go.

Emma Mahlunge used her pension salary to set up a training center where the destitute and homeless women of former farm workers found shelter until they could move to nearby villages. She registered this centre as the "Kunzwana Women's Association".

There, women are still taught practical skills such as making clothes, knitting, sewing, weaving, farming, carpentry, small animal husbandry, making soap, peanut butter and other food products.

In order to further expand the center, she established contacts with other women's organizations in the country and worldwide. Today the Kunzwana Women's Association is one of the most important non-governmental organizations in Zimbabwe with 7.650 members from 215 villages. Her daughter, Dr. Emmie Wade, has now taken over the leadership and continues her mother's work.

In March 2018, Emma Mahlunge was awarded the "Human Rights Award" for her life's work.



*Co-workers at Kunzwana Women's Association*



## ...as religious education scholar – standing up for variety and learning without competition

Since October 2019, Dr Hyun Sun OH from the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) supports the team of FRIENDS - EMS Children's Programme with ten hours per week. EMS wants to gain experiences how internationalisation can succeed. Dr Hyun Sun OH is a pastor at PCK and lecturer for theology and pedagogics at Space Elizabeth near Seoul. As a member of EMS Mission Council, she has been closely connected to the EMS for a long time.



*How do people in your workshops in South Korea respond to EMS' offer to work with children internationally?*

Almost all the participants were pastors who are involved in the educational ministry in their churches. They have expressed two positive impressions on the workshop in large. Firstly, they have realized that the theme 'diversity' is including not only differences but also similarities among children in the world. The booklet DIVERSITY invites children to contact friends living in different sides of the world beyond the geographical boundaries. Secondly, small themes in the booklet are well connected with the Bible practically. It is very good to start from the stories of children and children can open the Bible naturally.

*What do I learn by attending a workshop where you present the EMS Children's Programme?*

One of participants said, "Generally, teachers expect and ask the children to give answers back after teacher's questions in the Sunday school. However, through this workshop I have had chances to see the possibilities that children would have shared their insights and life concerns from their own perspectives if they are motivated." Since Korean society insists on social success, a competitive situation is formed in the lives of children. Therefore, children are used to how others are saying about their opinions and to think their answers are correct or wrong before they speak. This booklet shows that just simple questions to the children help children to explain their own experiences and they become to be able to share their lives without any pressure. I think these are strong

points of this programme.

*Is there anything that is especially important for such a Children's Programme in South Korea?*

Christian children in South Korea are needed to be encouraged to experience Jesus as a friend of them not as the judge or punisher. I hope that Korean Christian children learn on peace in practical way like this programme. As a divided country, we, including the children, used to hear a great discourse on peace not a tangible peace in daily lives.

*What do you think children from South Korea, but also from other countries, need from our churches for the future?*

In the relation with the third question, peace education is important. Sharing the ideas and understandings on peace from other countries, children in the world keep listening other's voices and praying together. Anything, any theme, and any idea can be shared among the children in the world, if we are doing this project continuously. We, EMS, realized already that children are creative, open-minded, and have fun through this programme, don't we?

<https://friends-blog.ems-online.org/en/>

*The interview was conducted by Anna Kallenberger and Annette Schumm.*

## ...as a blind woman – struggling for self-reliance

by Rev. Dr Rima Nasrallah, EMS Liaison Woman in Lebanon, speaker of the International Women's Network at EMS General Assembly

I waited for her on the side-walk of a heavily dug up street in Beirut thinking how will I be able to walk with a blind woman back to my place when even I, as a sighted person could hardly avoid falling in the pit. Nada, however, thought otherwise. She laughed at me when I shared my worries. "Why do sighted people always think that blind people cannot make it?"

Nada came all the way from her village in the south to Beirut on a mission that day. It took her and her equally blind sister Mariam, more than an hour and quite a lot of money to reach me. For weeks, we had been discussing how to download the application "cash reader" on her phone. "I want to feel independent," she kept repeating every time she called with a new suggestion on how to go about buying the app.

As blind women living alone, Nada and Mariam are legally not allowed to open a bank account without a sponsor. However, neither one of the ladies was able to trust anyone else to join them in managing their small savings. The anxiety to get that application that can read Lebanese Pound bills exasperated during the Covid-19 Lockdown.

Unable to get out of the house the two sisters had to order their groceries and other needs from neighbouring shops. However, as only one deliveryman showed up at their door with their ordered parcels, there was no one else around to verify what are the bills that they were given back as change and they were often tricked.

Nada was born blind in the year 1970. Her sister, twelve years older acted as a mother to her as they had lost their sight at a very early age. The father soon remarried taking with him his other sighted children but leaving the blind girls behind with elderly grandparents. Though the two sisters found a loving environment in the school for the blind and were given a chance to get an education and self-confidence, the Lebanese society was never kind to them. There is a certain stigma in Lebanon around people with a disability.

"People think we are stupid because we are blind," said Nada. "They think that if you cannot see you have no potential, no value and can achieve nothing".

The infrastructure of Lebanon is not friendly to any type of disability. The roads, the shops, the job market, and even churches are not equipped for the blind. Yet, this does not stop Nada from remaining active and striving to keep herself independent.

Our meeting that day finally happened in the nearby house of one of her best friends, another blind woman, Jamile. As the three women invited me to join them for coffee, I was amazed at the strong bonds of fellowship between them. They shared with me about the extra difficulties experienced by blind women in the Arab world. "I sometimes need someone to walk me, like when I am travelling at airports" told Jamile, "but most porters and assistants are men and they wouldn't accept to touch a woman's elbow".

Though they are all enterprising women, they are nervous about being left alone with men because they know how they are looked upon as easy prey. When finally, we could download the desired app, Nada's face lit up. Another step towards independence was achieved. "I only want friends and God's presence in my life, but never would I accept the 'charity narrative' that is often pushed in our face", she finally said.



Photographer: Rima Nasrallah

## ...as a survivor of domestic violence – living in self-determination

Najda (not her real name) wrote her report on her own, staff of KAFA\* helped translate from Arabic into English. Contact was established by Martina Waiblinger representing Evangelical Society for the Schneller Schools (EVS) at EMS Women's Advisory Board.

Najda escaped years of marriage filled with physical and psychological abuse. When she first married her husband, she thought he was a "normal guy" but then he turned out to be a "monster".

She discloses that her husband used to hit her repeatedly for minor issues such as not cooking a specific meal. Her husband would erupt in anger when she cleans the house and would hit her with the mop stick because he needs her constant attention. He once hit her in the face and broke her teeth because their children were performing poorly in school and she suggested recruiting a private tutor.

Throughout these years of domestic violence, eventually her body accumulated enough stress that it manifested itself in physical symptoms. In addition, she even was diagnosed with cancer. During that time, the physician

informed her husband of her need for special care and attention. On the contrary, her husband refused that her parents would accompany her or visit her at the hospital. He kept her isolated from her family.

Now the situation changed. A friend advised her to seek assistance from KAFA where she received psychological and legal support.

"KAFA has given me so much support and I am currently leading an independent life. I am now empowered enough to confront him."

Najda is fighting her husband in court who is trying to deprive her from seeing her children. "My best accomplishment is that I regained control of my life and established myself. It is a long process... and I am hoping it will soon come to an end."

*\*KAFA (means "enough") is a feminist, secular, non-profit, civil society organization. KAFA has been aiming to eliminate gender-based violence and exploitation since its establishment in 2005. It seeks to realize substantive gender equality through Advocacy for law reform; influencing public opinion,*

*practices and mentality; conducting research and training; and empowering women and children victims of violence, and providing them with social, legal, and psychological support.*



*A long way with a new perspective*

# Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians hear the cry: "Mama, Mama... I Can't Breathe!"

**Prof. Musa W. Dube, the General Coordinator of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians\*, published the following declaration on June 7, 2020, Gaborone, Botswana:**

As members of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians\*, our hearts have been torn; our spirits have been deeply stirred; and our faces are drowned in tears, since the throttling of Mr George Floyd, a black man. In broad daylight, in Minneapolis, USA on May 25, 2020, Mr Floyd was handcuffed, pinned down to the hard concrete, while a white policeman pressed his knee on Floyd's throat for eight minutes, 46 seconds, suffocating him. Floyd pleaded for his life to no avail until he finally succumbed to death.

This deep wound of racism is not only found in the USA; it is a worldwide structure of oppression. Since the days of colonialism when racism served as the instrument of white supremacy, it has remained inbuilt in global economics, politics and knowledge systems. Two-Thirds World countries continue to suffocate under the knee of racism that has relegated them to exploitation and poverty.

Like those who stood on the sidewalk as Mr Floyd was losing his life, we have become eyewitnesses of his death. Through the technological devices that recorded the event and sent it out to the world, we have seen his suffering, we have felt his pain, we have heard his cry until he lost his life. His cry has become our cry.

His cry is the cry of all people of color everywhere, oppressed on the basis of their skin color. His cry has become the cry of all people everywhere who love justice and peace. His call has become the cry of all people who worship the God liberation (Exodus 3:7-9). His call for help is no longer the tragic eight-minute episode—it is rather an endless call of the past, present and future voices that have been denied justice.

We are called to remain eternally attentive to his appeal to Mother: "Mama! Mama... I can't breathe!" As Mercy A. Oduyoye has underlined, mothers of the womb, mothers of the heart and mothers of justice are co-creators with God in protecting all life, in the management of God's resources and modelling what constitutes good governance (2004: 57-68\*\*).

And as the "Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians", we are commanded by Mr Floyd's appeal to mothers everywhere to embark on a journey for justice

against murder, racism and all other forms of discrimination. We remain commanded by his haunting voice to uproot structural forces of racism and to birth justice for Mother Earth and all her children through our work in the academy and the communities that we serve.

We remain called to the duty to protect the sanctity of all lives by exposing, opposing structures of discrimination and searching for a space of nurturing all life.

We appreciate the worldwide movement that has stood up in solidarity with Mr Floyd, with African Americans, and with all people of color who are subjected to structural racism and white supremacy everywhere. We celebrate this sign of hope in the horizons of our skies. We urge the whole Earth Community to remain restless until we have named and uprooted all traces of racism and all forms of oppression embedded in our histories, cultures, institutions, policies and structures. Until we have truly delivered dignity and freedom to every oppressed member of the Earth community, let us remain haunted by George Floyd's call,

*"Mama! Mama.... I can't breathe!"*

*with kind permission of Dr Dube, slightly shortened*



*\*The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians is a pan-African ecumenical organization supporting scholarly research of African women theologians. The Circle serves to mentor the next generation of African women theologians throughout their academic careers in order to counter the dearth of academic theological literature by African women.*

**References:**

Rachel NyaGondwe Fiedler:  
*A History of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians 1989-2007*

\*\* Oduyoye, Mercy A., *Beads and Strands: Reflections of an African Woman on Christianity in Africa.* New York, 2004

**Personal:**

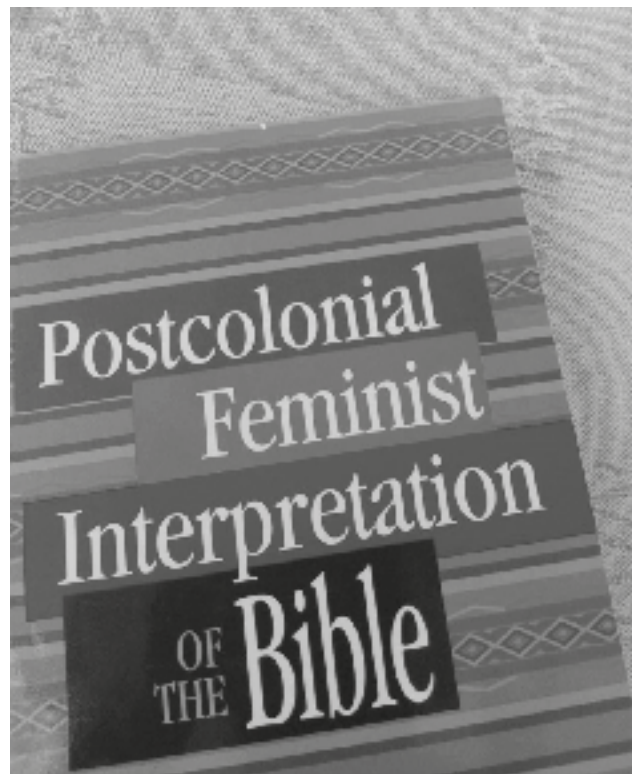
Musa W. Dube (\*1964) is a feminist theologian from Botswana. She became known with her work on "Post-colonial Biblical Scholarship" (see also book reference\*: Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible).

In 1997, she received her doctorate in New Testament Studies at Vanderbilt University and taught in Botswana for many years. For fall 2021, she received an appointment at the Candler School of Theology/USA.

**Quote from Musa W. Dube:**

"One of the most important movements in the African context that has helped me a lot is the Circle ... which was founded by Mercy Oduyoye. When she realized in the early 1980s that she was only among male scholars and that science was defined from the male perspective, she began to look for other African women and encouraged us to look at our religion from other perspectives, how it influences women's lives, and how we can create a knowledge that really opposes patriarchy".

(Source: Interview Liberation Theological Network, Germany)



## ...as “privileged women” – standing up for justice Breathing in... breathing out... mourning... getting up again

**Judith Kotzé is qualified Dutch Reformed minister since December 1995. After many years serving in ministry at Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM)\* based in Cape Town, South Africa, she is currently working as an independent consultant, facilitator, organic coach, and spiritual director.**

I have experienced connecting, relating, and caring abilities as solid strengths amongst especially women in many faith communities and cultures in South Africa. Maybe this is due to the socially constructed gender roles, where women are more often than not, encouraged and conditioned to develop their relating abilities from very early on, to take care of and stay aware of those around them, to see when and where help is needed, to come closer, connect deeper, reach out to touch, hug and hold others.

Facing the current worldwide pandemic with its burning issues, these strengths in connecting, relating and caring are under huge pressure by the reality of how COVID-19 as virus is spreading and the need for physical distancing, forced isolation and unfamiliar quarantine experienced by many. COVID-19 is also highlighting the fault lines of economic and power inequalities as it relates to women.

In South Africa, most of the frontline workers in the health sector are women, yet economically they are not necessarily the ones determining how much money will be allocated for personal protective equipment, how care at their home will be done in an equal sustainable way or how safety and security against domestic violence\*\* will be addressed effectively.

Also a tsunami of unemployment is affecting thousands of women who had some form of work in the most negatively affected areas, like the hospitality sector, the day-care pre-school setting, the tourist industry, and informal market settings, providing food at taxi and train stations, to name but a few.

Add to the above the systemic violence of police brutality in the suffocating death of George Floyd resulting in an eruption of worldwide outcry through mostly peaceful protests, I want to add my cry with all.... We can't breathe.... Change must come...

I have discovered deep undercurrents of emotions in and around me that varies from intense rage, anger, frustration\*\*\* in many different heat waves; to ice-cold freezes of helplessness, powerlessness and hopelessness; to numbed out deadened experiences of despair, denial, abdication and resignation as the pandemic continues to spread, lockdown limitations get revealed and uncertainty, fear, vulnerability and huge losses continue to increase in South Africa. One of these losses, I join the World Council of Churches (WCC) in mourning the death of Rev. Prof. Dr Mary-Anne

Plaatjies van Huffel, a South African pastor and academic who was currently serving as the WCC president from Africa since 2013.

Our paths crossed as women theologians in the nineties in South Africa, as well as in these recent years in the WCC context. I experienced her as an inspiration as first woman to be ordained in the Reformed Church tradition of which I am part of, first black woman to become professor at the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University where I completed my theological studies and as a role model for women in and outside of the church in how to overcome huge challenges of racism, sexism, prejudices, etc. through her faith, courage and commitment to transforming our society for the better.

I am inspired by her to continue to find ways to deepen connections across race, class, gender, sexual orientation, generations, to keep reaching out to relate, to care, to collaborate during the pandemic and as its burning issues impact the most vulnerable amongst us in many life-threatening ways.

What is grounding and sustaining for me right now is to stay present and aware of our Christian faith journey as we collectively and individually open up to the full experience of Easter and Pentecost as pilgrims together on the way for justice and peace.

First, I open up to the pilgrimage taking me to the crucifixion and the grave, to carrying my cross and laying burdens down at the feet of the One who made the way open for all to connect with God directly and authentically. Jesus Christ, Immanuel, God with us.

Secondly, I risk on this pilgrimage to grief fully, mourn all the losses, pain and hurt through outcry, lamenting and protest until full expression brings relief to breathe again. Calming down, letting go and breathing in to receive the



*Judith Kotzé*

power of the Holy Spirit that fills our beings with the breath of Life so that we can stand up again.

Then seeking other pilgrims of faith and searching together how our journey can be continued in a world of turmoil, how we can move into compassionate actions and justice seeking collaborations.

### Fellow pilgrims in Reutlingen, Germany:

Refugees are being held in an undignified inhumane manner on the borders of Europe, without effective protection against the pandemic. Here we are in demand as privileged European women #LeaveNoOneBehind”.

“You can’t have a big rally in times of Corona”, the organizers of Asylpfarramt Reutlingen (Pastorate for asylum seekers) and SEEBRÜCKE said. But 600 pairs of shoes spoke for themselves. They should draw attention to the catastrophic situation in the Greek refugee camps...and remind the city council of Reutlingen of its own decision to accept refugees from there (photos on the right).



[www.leavenoonebehind2020.org/de](http://www.leavenoonebehind2020.org/de)



G. Mayer with mask: “protection also for refugees”

\* Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM) has a vision of faith communities in Africa that are welcoming and affirming LGBT-people.

\*\* <https://businesstech.co.za/news/lifestyle/406325/big-jump-in-murders-in-south-africa-since-the-start-of-level-3-lockdown/>

\*\*\* <https://mg.co.za/coronavirus-essentials/2020-05-27-youth-unemployment-covid-crisis-south-africa/>

## ...as co-worker at the Health Department – living on by faith

**Anda Nonhlanhla Nkosi is deputy speaker of EMS International Women's Network at EMS General Assembly**



*Anda Nonhlanhla Nkosi*

Greetings to fellow Sisters in Christ and all the readers of OUR VOICES!

My name is Nonhlanhla Nkosi, a 41-year-old single lady with no children.

I work for the Health Department in one of the nine provinces in South Africa whilst also doing a Master's Degree in Business Administration on a part time basis. I am blessed and honoured to be part of this EMS women's network of wonderful women as a substitute representative of the delegate to the EMS General Assembly.

Most people call me by my other simpler name, Anda, because my formal name is long and rather complicated to pronounce. My formal name means "the lucky one"! My mother and father were 43 and 53 years old respectively when I was born, so I guess that was where the name came from.

I am the last born of seven surviving children and I look after family home (my mother and a nephew of mine with her three children) who all live about 100 kilometres from East London. I generally visit them once a month, but now with the Covid-19 lockdown regulations, the visits have not been that often, but I keep in touch with them on the phone.

Growing up, I got introduced to church by my parents. My father was an Evangelist in our church in my rural village. He was a much-loved man because of his kindness, wisdom and helpfulness to the whole village. I think I took the sense of service and care for the community and society from him. He taught simple but valuable lessons that continue to shape my life as I grow up. Sadly, he passed on in 2009 at the age of 83.

I now attend church in the Moravian Church in the seaside town of East London.

My congregation is small but very vibrant. I am a Treasurer of the congregation and pretty much helps with all the financial reporting requirements for my congregation and the district. I love my congregation very much: they really gave me a platform to grow and exercise my skills from an early age and this has helped me to gain confidence in public speaking as well as presentation skills.

As a mid-aged person in church now, I would really like to see the church being more relevant to society by responding to challenges that confront ordinary people.

I sometimes feel that the church should "live" the word of God more than "preach/talk" the word. Also the fact that there are fewer young people in church means it is not relevant to young people, and therefore such programs as community outreach programs to poor communities, youth mentoring support programs etc and modern worshipping could help to keep young people in church and give them a sense of purpose early in life.



*Eastern Cape*



As earlier indicated, I work for the Department of Health in my province in the position of a Strategic Support Manager to the Head of Department for Health. My job entails coordinating operations of the department by linking the office of the Head of the Department with the different divisions (Finance, Human Resources and Clinical Services). Our health department has over 51.000 employees so to keep in touch with everything and everyone across more than 1.000 health facilities is a challenge but also gives the most satisfying feeling.

With the current Corona virus, I look at this time as an opportunity for society to think how they go do things differently going forward. I believe it is a time to reflect on the fact that we are all equal before God, both rich and poor, black or white. We should use this time to show compassion to one another and help those most in need. Many people especially small businesses will lose jobs because of the impact of the virus in society so as the world we need to see how we can help one another to better each other lives for the betterment of all humanity.

I pray that everyone keeps safe at this time and that we will come out this situation stronger and more united as the people of the world.



Bell tower

**In July, Anda sent this mail:**

*Dear Sisters, thanks for your concern. We are surviving under the circumstances. Indeed, the rates are increasing in big numbers daily and we are starting to lose colleagues on a daily basis. It is hard but we trust on the Lord. Thanks for your thoughts and prayers.*



Church in Eastern Cape

## ...as a teacher – supporting girls in a violent environment

**Sr. Buyiswa Sambane is EMS Liaison woman of the Moravian Church in South Africa (MCSA). She is elected General Secretary of the MCSA Women's Fellowship, works as a teacher in Gauteng/Eastern Cape and raises three children with her husband, a minister of the MCSA.**

Within the South African context, in Eastern Cape, we are living in an environment that is cruel, vicious, hungry and angry. The violation of human rights, more especially the rights of women and our girl children, is of no consequence to our male counterparts.

I am fortunate to be exposed to both rural and urban life. Unfortunately, in both areas young girls are seeing the victimization of their mothers, sisters, their siblings and in some instances, themselves. The environment which they are living in often recreates a cycle of poverty and vulnerability for oppression.

Many young girls in my community are heading families due to various reasons. When the child decides to drop out from school in order to support siblings, such a situation creates a fertile environment for child prostitution and human trafficking. In many of these cases, youth turn to drug and substance abuse—another venue of manipulation and enslavement by their male captors.

Our big challenges are femicide, domestic violence, rape of both the girl and the boy child, teenage or unplanned pregnancies. Our president talked of two pandemics we are facing in South Africa: Covid-19 and sexual violence.

### There are objectives that can help to equip and transform the lives of our young girls:

- Fight against Gender Based Violence, Trauma Counseling, Educational and Vocational Skills Development, especially for girls in our child headed households,
- Equipping young men to create positive masculinities instead of male dominance and oppression,
- Mentoring of both the girl and boy child, Poverty Alleviation programs for Women (most women are victims because of poverty),
- Encouraging youth centers as a place where information is shared, space provided as an equal setting where both girls and boys can talk, laugh and learn to interact with each other in respect and dignity,
- Health Education to be aware of first aid in everything, especially in view of COVID-19 pandemic,
- Youth month sanitary benefit (restoring the dignity of young girls),
- Introduce debates about real-life situations (real-life case studies),
- Supporting victims via creating a support system within our communities—no child or woman should suffer in silence.



*Girls dance group at the KATLEHONG Primary School*

## Strengthening young girls in everyday life

In my school, we have children that are coming from the nearby areas like Bush. They come with no birth certificates or identity documents, which prevents them to benefit in any government grants for children.

It is a very big challenge as their parents also come without permits. While parents look for work they are taken to prison for being illegal in Gauteng. When parent does not return in the afternoon the oldest has to take over and head the family. In our community we have 16 families headed by children due to different cases.

In one family children came back from school to their shack and found their mother sleeping in bed, little did they know she was already dead terribly injured and abused. Can you imagine that trauma? These young ones live with fear of the unknown, lack of trust and end up being violent for they are every day victims. It is very difficult to apply legal assistance for children without any papers.

Together with five other teachers, we are illegally fostering these children. It is very difficult to educate a child who is also acting as a parent. We try to find structures for them to stay in the same area at least. Young girls believe in quick cash. Peer pressure makes them see old men hoping they can make better lives for them.

The church, being at the center of our personal and communal existence within the African context, is strategically placed to offer a beacon or opportunity of hope, justice and a better life. In our everyday lives, women do not need to remain the victims of violence, but can become the victors and promoters of peace, justice and equality in our communities and churches. As women from the church, our roles are not limited to remain onlookers from the sideline, but become front liners in the fight for a life of dignity for our children, both girls and boys and ourselves.



*Two dedicated colleagues at her school*



**In July, Buyiswa sent the following mail:**

*Good morning Gabriele and the whole team. We are still safe under His protection. Gauteng my area is now a hot spot. We hope our government will hear the cry from the teachers, students and parents to close schools until September. Thank you for checking have a good and safe stay all of you.*

# ...as a pastor – facing conflicts over unintentional pregnancies

**Rev. Angelika Maschke represents the regional Association of Protestant Women in Hesse and Nassau e.V. Germany on EMS Women's Advisory Board**



Angelika Maschke

Many women have been in the situation of being unintentionally pregnant. Even women we know and love, as mothers, sisters, grandmothers, friends, have had an abortion. We often just don't know about it. They experience many feelings - grief and pain, guilt, but also relief and gratitude. In retrospect, most women say that their decision was not easy for them, but it was the right one.

## **Women worldwide suffer from a lack of medical care and are stigmatized**

We EMS women come from countries where abortion is handled in very different ways. In almost all countries, it is illegal, but possible under certain conditions. While in South Africa, a woman is free to decide whether she is ready to become a mother, in Lebanon a medical abortion is only allowed if the woman's life is in danger. In India, Ghana or Japan the indications are very broad. In Nigeria, a woman, even after being raped, is not allowed to have an abortion - only if her life or health is in danger. Worldwide, the highest rate of abortions per 1000 women of childbearing age is in Latin America and the Caribbean, followed by Asia, Africa, Europe, Oceania and North America. This suggests that poverty is an important factor. If restrictive legislation is then added, these unintentionally pregnant women run a high risk of being harmed by an abortion.

Worldwide, about 17 million abortions are carried out every year under "less safe" conditions and about 8 million under "least safe" conditions. Nearly 50,000 women die each year from unsafe abortions, especially in countries where legal access is not or hardly possible. About 5 million women have to go to hospital every year for treatment after an unsafe abortion. Many of them suffer needlessly from consequential damage, unable to provide for their families, their fields are left untended, their education is interrupted, and their hopes for life are destroyed.\*

Many doctors who perform abortions do so because of their Christian faith, like Dr Willie Parker\*\*. Motivated by the Gospel, they wish to help women and not leave them alone in particularly difficult circumstances. And I wonder why, in many churches, their work for women's health is not appreciated and valued, especially as these people are often particularly vulnerable to hostility and threats. Dr George Tiller, also a Christian and active church member, was murdered by a so-called "life protector".

The subject of abortion is a taboo subject. Also in many churches and congregations, women who have had abortions are stigmatised and made to feel guilty.

## **Is unhappiness part of women's lives?**

Where does the stigma come from? I will talk about my personal development and the thoughts I had growing up in a small town in the 70s and 80s. I didn't know of any women who had had an abortion, but I knew there was "something like that". It struck me as strange at the time that these women did not want to take their mother role for granted.

I thought after all they could have used contraception, and I did not understand why it was so crucial for them not to have a child. Although I had noticed that women were not always happy with their role in the family, this sad reality was just normal for me in my environment at that time. It was just part of women's life.

Yet, at the same time, I myself longed to live a happier and freer life as a girl and growing woman, than what was normal for women. Moreover, I sensed that the feminists I had met, in their struggle for justice for women in church and society, had ideas, which would not let go of me either.

My view on abortion changed when I read John Irving's novel "God's Work and the Devil's Contribution" during my studies. The story, set in the 1920s in the USA, opened my eyes to the fact that every woman can become pregnant unintentionally. I understood that quite simply carelessness, misfortune or even very tragic circumstances could cost women their lives if there is no medical help. It became clear to me that before even one woman has to entrust her life to botchers, doctors must be allowed to help. The abortion issue is the key to female freedom and security in a society.



## Christians are committed to reproductive rights and reproductive justice

With the controversy about the §219a (p.30) in Germany since the end of 2017 I began to rethink the whole problem. For the reasons already mentioned, I signed the petition of the physician Kristina Hänel for the right of women for information about abortion. I, now being a pastor, did not want to remain on the side lines when female doctors are sentenced in court for providing information and help. The §219a became an important political topic in Germany, also for church women. First, the Landesverband Evangelische Frauen in Hessen und Nassau e.V./Association of Protestant Women, then the Evangelical Women in Germany, campaigned for the abolition of §219a.

I also began to get involved with the women at deanery level in the local alliance Pro Choice. The older women from our women's fellowship told me about a schoolmate who had died, before the reform of §218, bleeding to death during an abortion in the basement of her house. Also about the friend who was too ill to go to school for months after her own mother, a nurse, had helped her with the abortion. For the women of our regional women's fellowship it is clear that access to safe abortion is of enormous value.

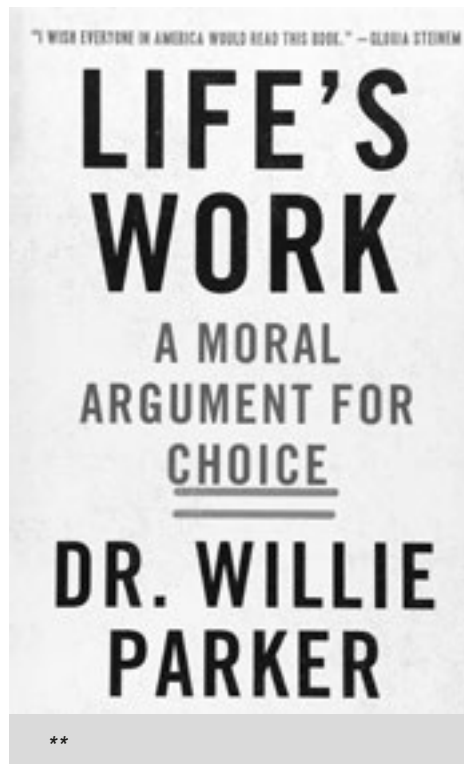
According to the Christian faith, women and men are created equal, equally qualified, endowed with equal rights and equal dignity. If churches judge and act unilaterally to the detriment of women, something is not right, said (retired) Probst Michael Karg in 2018 on §219a in Gießen. It can't just be about what we don't want. It is also about values for which we as Christians, men and women, must stand up for - the dignity of women is such a value. Every woman deserves respect for her decision to carry a child or to terminate the pregnancy. She knows her life circumstances best, and whether she can trust in herself and her environment. The free decision—not pushed in one direction or the other by anyone—is a human right. In addition, the freedom to decide according to one's conscience is an important Christian value.

I would like to see churches addressing the judgment of women in pregnancy conflict with an attitude of trust and help them, whatsoever they decide. In the USA, the Pro Choice Movement has also just emerged from the work of pastoral workers who, like Rev Tom Davis (UCC), have been active in the Clergy Consultation Service (CCS) since the 1960s. The Catholics for Choice are committed to reproductive justice primarily on the basis of Catholic social ethics. Moreover, in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice many churches and faith communities are ecumenically and interreligiously united. I would be happy to hear about further examples.

\* WHO/Lancet/Guttmacher

Ganatra et al: *Global, regional, and subregional classification of abortions by safety, 2010–14*  
*Lancet* 2017; 390: 2372–81

*Unsafe abortion—Global and Regional Estimates in 2008.*  
 WHO Publikation, 2011



continued on page 30

## ...embroidering women becoming political activists

**Josefina Hurtado Neira is Chilean, currently Head of the Gender Unit at Mission 21 in Basel, Switzerland. She introduces us to Inés Pérez Cordero, a longtime companion who combines political protest with art.**



*Inés Pérez Cordero*

Inés Pérez Cordero belongs to the movement “Bordadoras en Resistencia” (Embroiderers in Resistance). Since October 2019, this group has been actively participating in the protest demonstrations in Chile. It denounces the multiple forms of discrimination suffered by the most vulnerable groups in Chilean society, which is a consequence of the neoliberal model promoted by the Chilean state and the fundamentalist religious currents that have prevailed in recent decades. I am moved by Inés’ deep spirituality and her desire to support other women so that they can find their own way in life.

I first met Inés Pérez Cordero at a conference of the women’s network of Mission 21 in Chile. At that time, in the late 1990s, she was working in SEPADE, Servicio Evangélico para el Desarrollo (Evangelical Development Service). I was part of the Colectivo Ecofeminista Con-spirando\*. I also had the task of evaluating and accompanying the programs of Mission 21 in Chile.

The working methodology during the conference we both attended enabled “safe spaces” in which we could creatively express our role as leaders. As Inés told us in the final round, she had originally participated out of a sense of duty to her institution. But now, unexpectedly, ways had opened up which enabled her to go further and with more motivation than she had previously thought possible.

As a trained teacher, Inés was already able to use her skills at her institution when working with vulnerable people. Now, meeting with other leaders, she “discovered” even more creative potential in herself. This urged her to more unfolding: she introduced joint movement, free expression and circle dances as ways to develop leadership potential and express spirituality.

After several autodidactic workshops, Inés continued her training as a coordinator for circle dances and accompanied groups in various cities in Chile and Latin America.

During my recent trip to Santiago, I went with one of my daughters to watch a theatre performance in which one of Inés’ daughters took part. During the conversation after the play, we congratulated each other for having the audacity to reinvent ourselves in our professions and celebrated our daughters who took the risk of becoming artists in an environment that does not always look kindly on such endeavours.



*Embroidery and political discussions*

During this period of global crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, I learned a lot from Inés. Through WhatsApp, she asked me to accompany activists during lockdown by sharing prayers, relaxation exercises and meditations.

Besides the continuous support of activists from afar through dance and embroidery, Inés supports the community soup kitchens in the neighbourhood, which help to meet the food needs of many people who are now –due to the lockdown– unemployed, without rights and in isolation.



*Inés Pérez Cordero with a group of coordinators of circle dancing in Santiago de Chile*

*\*Group of feminist women in Latin America and the Caribbean in search of new insights into spirituality, feminist theology and eco-feminism.*

Further Information:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLSVGkUSNT0>  
<https://www.facebook.com/BordadorasenResistencia/>

## ...as a project manager – training internally displaced persons

In October 2019, Angeline Njotu visited the EMS secretariat in Stuttgart. Bärbel Wuthe, programme assistant and translator in the Gender Unit, accompanied her and noted down the conversation.

Women's Economic Empowerment & Literacy Project of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC) is a project for literacy and vocational training for women within the framework of the women's organisation of the PCC. It is supported by Mission 21 and designed for two years at a time. Their office is in Bamenda. Workshops are offered for women of all religions and usually held in the PCC premises.

### WEELP – Economic Empowerment

The target group are women in rural regions who are usually small informal traders and with a low level of education. Women of all religious affiliations are welcome. The aim is to improve their economic independence and improve their living conditions so that they no longer have to live from hand to mouth, can make their own decisions and find new market opportunities.

Angeline was born in Cameroon in 1978 and completed "Studies in Botany". For five years, she worked for Bread for the World in the field of arts and crafts promotion with the aim of improving the economic situation of women. Since 2009, she is in charge of the WEELP project at the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC). She is married and has two daughters.

Angeline coordinates these trainings, prepares follow-ups and checks whether the acquired knowledge is applied. She establishes contact with the Christian Women Fellowship (CWF) and the communities in the area. No "uniform" is worn, as the project is intended to signal openness to all regardless of religion or church affiliation.

### Effects of the political unrest in Cameroon on your work?

Angeline has now been able to visit eight of 25 presbyteries. Travel is restricted enormously by the crisis. Monday is always "Ghost Town Day", which means absolute curfew. Young men in particular are at risk of being perceived by both sides as belonging to the other. Kidnappings for extortion of money, looting and arson attacks are commonplace. Within the framework of the project, contacts can still be made via mobile phone or social media: counselling, some activities and reports can be realized via WhatsApp.

### WEELP Literacy Project

The second part of the project is its literacy programme. Courses are offered with a minimum of 16 hours per month. In the southwest of the country there are five classes, each has one teacher. In the north, there are even eight classes with nine teachers. They are all financially supported by the project. Through this programme, the participants experience major changes in their lives; they become more self-confident and have better chances of living in financial independence.



Angeline during an Advocacy Training at Mission 21



## ...SHALOM Initiative – supporting internally displaced people

Mary Salle Vagoga is the founder of Shalom-Initiative 2015, registered as association in Cameroon in 2017. She received a Graduate Diploma in Human Resource Management and in addition, a certificate of the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions on the theme "Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in Africa".

Since December 2017, the Shalom Initiative re-oriented its operations in the South West Region of Cameroon due to the increasing needs of people displaced by the internal socio-political crisis between the State armed groups and non-state armed groups.

### Humanitarian situation in the Region South West and North West

The internal crisis has driven over 40 000 thousand people from the South West and North West Regions from their homes, shattered local livelihood, and reinforced insecurity challenges. By June 2018, in Kumba for example, the doors of 50 out of 75 government secondary and private schools and over 40 nursery and primary schools have remained shut down. Imposed by armed groups, ghost town is observed every Monday. This is slowly draining the economy.

In the toughest areas, many villages were burned. Among the vulnerable categories are children who are exposed to nutritional deficiencies, lack of health care, unsafe water and lacking sanitation. Due to communicable diseases, unsafe water and sanitation, poor menstrual hygiene, and nutritional deficiencies especially women and the elderly are at risk of already deteriorating health challenges, poor nutrition, and psychological trauma.

### Livestock farming

Shalom Initiative through its pig farming project have been able to offer training on livestock farming to some internally displaced people and young children from some orphanages in Kumba. We hope that in the future our pig farm will be a source of revenue for us to keep supporting the orphanages and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in our community. We also offer training on poultry farming to some internally displaced persons who want to go into the poultry business as a start up to help them meet their daily needs.

### Education & Protection

Shalom Initiative is currently encouraging children within the environment who have been out of school for the past two years and children of IDPs within families settled in Kumba to participate in informal activities. These include waste management, games, reading faster lessons, reading competition but also short talks lectures and

workshops with regard to nonviolent communication and peace prevention. In as much as some children are showing up already, the response has been timid since parents are gripped with fear of the unknown.

### Healthcare

In the health domain, there is ongoing registration of IDPs faced with diverse health challenges coordinated by Shalom Initiative. Partnering with KEAFON HEALTH and MISSION21 we have given out health talks, organized counselling session, and health events, community outreach, menstrual hygiene awareness and distribution of Dignity kits to the internally displaced persons in our communities.



*Distribution of supplies for daily needs*



*Project Livestock Farming*

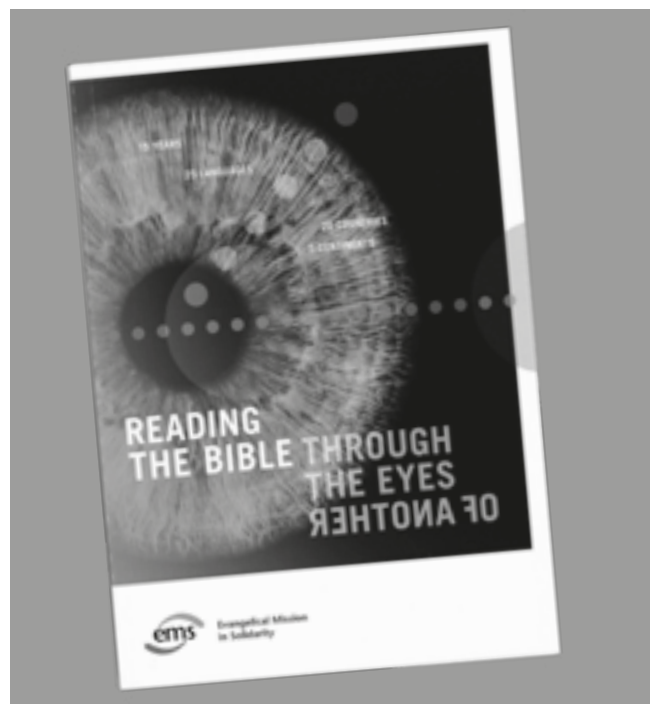
## ...reading the Bible and discovering new perspectives

**This book marks an important step on an intercultural spiritual journey in the EMS fellowship of 28 churches and mission societies in Africa, Asia, Europa and the Middle East.**

It reflects on exciting and challenging experiences during a 15-year process of "Reading the Bible through the Eyes of another". During three project periods, approximately 250 groups in 20 different countries teamed up. They aimed to exchange and share as intercultural pairs of partner groups on how biblical texts spoke into their respective lives. Several international workshops in Africa, Asia and Europe provided opportunities for intensive personal encounters adopting various methods and approaches to learn from each other, to worship together, and to celebrate life in diversity.

In 2018, a workshop on hermeneutics in Bangalore, India, with participating scholars from various theological institutions in the EMS fellowship embarked on an effort to combine the participatory grassroots approach with academic reflection. At the same time, they presented their specific and contextual approaches to Bible reading.

Available via Esuberanza <https://www.esuberanza.nl/en>



continued from page 25

### The § 219a criminal code

has a German distinctive feature. Introduced in 1933 under the Nazi regime, it prohibits "advertising" for abortions, last amended in March 2019:

(1) Anyone who, in public, in a meeting or by distributing leaflets (§ 11, Subsection 3), for personal profit or in a grossly offensive manner

1. offers, announces, promotes or makes public statements of such content, for own or third party services to perform or promote an abortion, or
2. any means, objects or procedures which are suitable for terminating a pregnancy, with reference to such suitability, is punishable by imprisonment for up to two years or by a fine.

For years, §219a has been used by anti-abortion activists to denounce doctors with the aim of securing their conviction in time-consuming and costly criminal proceedings. Not only the physician Kristina Hänel, but also other female doctors are currently affected by this.

### CEDAW

is the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It came into force under international law on September 3rd 1981.

The CEDAW Committee in Geneva accompanies the constant, dialogical process of state reports by the government and alternative reports by non-governmental organisations.

In its detailed alternative report to the interim meeting in March 2020, the German Alliance for Choice draws attention to violations of CEDAW in Germany, particularly of CEDAW Articles 2, 10 and 12 (exercise of health rights, access to information and access to health care).

These include the criminalization of abortions through regulation by the penal code, the shortage, especially in rural areas, of contraceptives, the insufficient supply for low-income women, the consequences of Section 219a for female doctors and unintentionally pregnant women, the three-day waiting period and compulsory counselling, which often lead to time pressure, and the frequent lack of training for abortions, with the result that too often medical practice is not up to date.

## The Liaison Women of the International Women's Network



**OUR VOICES** is published once a year in English, Indonesian and German language for the International EMS Women's Network. Responsible in the sense of press law: Dr. Gabriele Mayer

**EDITORIAL BOARD:** Gabriele Mayer, Bärbel Wuthe

**LANGUAGE:** We apologize for language errors. English is not the first language of most of our authors. Funds are limited for native speakers' translations.

**DESIGNED BY:** Elke Zumbruch, Stuttgart

**ADDRESS:** Women & Gender Desk, International Women's Network  
 Evangelical Mission in Solidarity  
 Vogelsangstraße 62, 70197 Stuttgart Germany  
 Tel.: 0049 (0) 7 11 6 36 78-38/-43 / Fax: 0049 (0) 7 11 6 36 78-45  
 E-Mail: mayer@ems-online.org / wuthe@ems-online.org  
 Internet: www.ems-online.org  
 Link to OUR VOICES/E-Book:  
<https://ems-online.org/en/publicationsmedia/magazines/our-voices/>

**PRINT:** Grafische Werkstätte der BruderhausDiakonie, Reutlingen/Germany, October 2020

**TRANSLATIONS:** page 6, 10-12, 24-25, 28 from German: Bärbel Wuthe  
 page 26-27 from Spanish: Bärbel Wuthe

**COPY RIGHT:** \*Poem on the back: with friendly permission of Verlag Herder, Freiburg/Germany in German, translated by Bärbel Wuthe

**COVER:** Collage with photos of Buyiswa Sambane/South Africa, Mama Sophia/Ghana, anonymous seamstress/Simbabwe (Kunzwana Women's Association), Nada&Najda/Lebanon, Hyung Sun OH/South Korea, Jasmine Alley/India

**PHOTOS:** EMS unless otherwise indicated, cherry blossoms p. 6: Christof Mayer, p. 7-9 private, p. 10-12 Kunzwana Women's Association, p. 14, 15, 18-19, 22-23, 24 private, p. 26-27, 28 Mission 21, p. 29 SHALOM Initiative

Articles identified by an author do not necessarily reflect the editors' opinion. Copies or reprint welcome, please indicate EMS source.

*Oh God, our dance,  
in which we live and move and exist.*

*Give us strength  
and help in our weakness,*

*so that with strength and momentum  
we enter into the movement of all your creation,*

*through our companion Jesus Christ.  
Amen.*

*Janet Morley\**



Evangelical Mission in Solidarity