



Ecumenical Women AT THE UNITED NATIONS

Ecumenical Women's Guide to Advocacy

Third Edition

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About Ecumenical Women

Ecumenical Women is an international coalition of church denominations and ecumenical organizations which have status with the Economic & Social Council (ECOSOC) or the Department of Public Information (DPI) at the United Nations. Grounded in our faith and commitment to global justice, Ecumenical Women trains and empowers an expanding network to advocate for gender equality at the United Nations.

Our Members:

Anglican Communion

Association of Presbyterian Women Aotearoa New Zealand

Church Women United

The Episcopal Church

Lutheran World Federation

Medical Mission Sisters

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

The Salvation Army

United Church of Christ

United Methodist Women

Women's Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church

World Council of Churches

World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women

World Student Christian Federation

World YWCA

Anglican Women's Empowerment (Friend)

National Council of Churches of Christ (USA) (Friend)

Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (Friend)

Note: The views expressed in this guide may not necessarily reflect the official policies or views of the participating organizations.

Welcome / Preface

We are delighted that you have joined us and trust that the benefits of advocating with the ecumenical community will bring you joy and accomplishment. As with every year, we have much work to do and we are very glad you are here to advocate with us.

Members of Ecumenical Women affirm God's preferential option for the marginalized and that Jesus has confirmed God's will that the world "may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). We envision a world community where human rights and the participation of each and every one is valued, where no one is excluded on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, age, ability or religion, and where full diversity is celebrated as God's gift to the world.

As a coalition, we seek to give those traditionally excluded from political decision-making bodies opportunities to speak truth to power through partnerships with our communities and through bringing women from around the world to the United Nations. Our Ecumenical Women coalition advocates for gender justice at the United Nations, incorporating annual advocacy trainings for our constituencies and delegations, network building and policy recommendations that challenge structures of inequality. Members of Ecumenical Women advocate not only for a few improvements but also for a fundamental system change in church and state to invest in and empower women worldwide.

It is our understanding that the church at its best can be a center which models policies that reinforce gender equality, creates budgets which reflect a desire to invest in women's equality, and which develops networks of women and men who resist systems of patriarchy, domination and abuse. We believe that the church is a powerful transformative vehicle for the teaching, protection and enforcement of women's rights and gender equality when its constituents and leadership are informed and empowered.

Our prayer is that you will use this guide during your time here and that its contents will equip you to take the work of advocacy back to your local communities embracing the work of faith that seeks out justice in your daily lives. May God give you strength for the journey and bless you here at the United Nations and around the world!

In Christ,



The Rev. Dionne P. Boissière
*Chaplain, Church Center for the UN
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Co-Chair, Ecumenical Women*



Mr. Ryan D. Smith
*Presbyterian Representative to the UN
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Co-Chair, Ecumenical Women*

Acronyms:

Beijing/BPFA – Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, The Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995

CCUN – Church Center for the United Nations

CEDAW – The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CSW – Commission on the Status of Women

CWU – Christian Women United

DAW – Division for the Advancement of Women (Department of Economic and Social Affairs)*

ECOSOC – Economic and Social Council

FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization

FBO – Faith-based organizations

GA or Assembly – General Assembly

IMF – International Monetary Fund

INSTRAW – International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women*

MDG – Millennium Development Goals

NGO – Non-governmental organization

OCHA – UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

OHCHR – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

OSAGI – Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women*

SC or Council – Security Council

SDG – Sustainable Development Goals

UN – United Nations

UNAIDS – Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

UNDP – UN Development Programme

UNESCO – UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNFPA – UN Populations Fund

UNHRC – UN Human Rights Council

UNICEF – UN Children’s Fund

UNIFEM – United Nations Development Fund for Women*

UN-Women – United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

WCC – World Council of Churches

WHO – World Health Organization

YWCA – Young Women’s Christian Association

*Combined in 2010 to create UN-Women

Part I

History of Ecumenical Women at the United Nations

“We must make sure of equal representation of women in decision-making and leadership in political, social and economic spheres.

We must ensure that girls’ education goes beyond secondary education. We must make sure that those that have dropped out get “second chances”. We must ensure that girls have access to services for their reproductive health and that their sexual and reproductive rights are respected. ...Creating a world with greater equality for generations to come is the defining and most urgent challenge of this century.”

– *Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka,*
United Nations Under-Secretary-General and
Executive Director of UN Women

There was a rich history of women in the church undertaking advocacy on behalf of marginalized groups (including themselves)

long before the Ecumenical Women coalition was formed. For centuries, Christian women have been transcending the boundaries of denominationalism to act together to seek and defend basic rights, especially women's rights.

Historically, one of the first active groups of ecumenical women was the World Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). Founded in 1858, it began in New York City as the "Ladies Christian Association."¹ Their groundbreaking work with the United Nations set a valuable precedent for later groups of Christian women to model. In fact, the YWCA would later help to found the Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations, which engaged the League of Nations and the International Labor Organization in the 1920s and 1930s. These conversations served as a precursor to the types of dialogue that nongovernmental organizations and coalitions enjoy today with the United Nations.²

In December 1941, 100 women representing 70 Protestant denominations and three large

interdenominational women's groups joined together to form the United Council of Church Women, now known as Church Women United (CWU). From the beginning, CWU was an active presence at the United Nations. In 1945, the Vice President of CWU, Georgiana Sibley, was an official observer at the signing of the original UN Charter in San Francisco.³ Later, CWU petitioned the United States to "join and take its full responsibility in a world organization;" This petition even drew a note of thanks from Eleanor Roosevelt. Today, CWU continues to bring its history, energy and activity as an active member of Ecumenical Women.⁴

While there was a growing understanding that church women needed to unite for the sake of strengthening their presence and work in the world, there were also strong voices within governments at the United Nations who advocated for women's leadership. Although only four out of the 160 signatories to the UN charter were women, the group laid critical groundwork for gender equality. The four represented the following countries: Brazil (Bertha Luz), China (Wu Yi-Fang), the Dominican Republic (Minerva Bernardino) and the United States of America (Virginia Gildersleeve). As representatives of their governments, they made sure that the

word “women” was inserted into the UN Charter. In doing so, they guaranteed that the principle of equality was part of the core of the United Nations. With the insertion of the word “women,” the argument that “men” included “women” was finally put to rest.⁵

In 1946, as part of the inaugural meetings of the UN General Assembly in London, the wife of United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt participated as an outspoken advocate for women’s rights. Indeed, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt spoke as a United States delegate in order to address the situation of the women of the world:

*To this end, we call on the governments of the world to encourage women everywhere to take a more active part in national and international affairs, and on women who are conscious of their opportunities to come forward and share in the work of peace and reconstruction as they did in war and resistance.*⁶

Within just one day of these words on June 21, 1946, a subcommission dedicated to the Status of Women was established under the Commission on Human Rights. Six months later, this subcommission formally became the Commission on the Status of Women, a “full-fledged Commission dedicated to ensuring women’s equality and to promoting women’s rights.”⁷ One of the first tasks of the commission was to find out *what exactly is the status of*

women worldwide. Because no comprehensive data had ever been collected, UN staff sent out a worldwide questionnaire. Governments responded with a wealth of information from around the world. The information received reinforced what many had suspected even without the data to prove it: inequality for women was based on cultural and religious customs, as well as written and unwritten laws and policies.⁸

With the establishment of the United Nations, ecumenical collaboration for the purpose of advocating for human rights began in earnest. One of the most often-remembered human rights advocates, Lutheran theology professor Frederick Nolde, helped draft Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the process, he communicated multiple times with the first chair of the Commission on Human Rights, Eleanor Roosevelt. Article 18 reads:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.*⁹

Although this language is not gender-neutral, it is significant to note that the 15 members of the first Commission on the Status of Women argued strongly for the insertion of gender-inclusive language in the Universal Declaration





The Ecumenical Decade (from 1985-1995) focused on themes such as women's participation in the work and life of churches, violence against women in church and society, and global economic injustice and racism as related to the lives of women.

of Human Rights. While this was not achieved in Article 18, they did succeed in introducing new and inclusive language in other Articles. This was a tremendous achievement in its historical context.¹⁰

At the same time the UN was planting its roots, the World Council of Churches (WCC) was established¹¹. By 1949, women were solidly on the WCC's agenda which set into motion a WCC Commission on the Life and Work of Women in the Church. By 1952, a Department of the Man-Woman Relationship in Church and Society existed; its purpose was to "help the churches to work towards such cooperation between men and women as may enable them to make their contribution to the common good of church and society."¹²

In the early 1960s, the busy ecumenical movement working at the United Nations realized they needed a space in which the agencies working for peace and human rights could collaborate more fully. The United Methodist Church set to the task and raised

the finances to build the Church Center for the United Nations (CCUN). Mia Adjali worked for the United Methodist Church Women's Division at the time the CCUN was founded.

"The Church Center was built about three years after I started working for the Women's Division," said Adjali. "We felt it was very important at the time to find a way to be a witness in the ecumenical movement to our belief and affirmation of the United Nations."¹³ It was largely through loans and donations of the Women of the United Methodist Church (now called United Methodist Women) that the building was even possible. The CCUN is still maintained and operated by the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church.

Today, the CCUN remains as it was at its inception: a space for collaboration and accompaniment for those advocating peace and human rights. The building houses offices of current Ecumenical Women members, including the Lutheran World Federation, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Methodist Office

for the United Nations and the World Council of Churches. On the concourse level, it also houses the Women's Resource Center, which remains dedicated to sharing documents of women's human rights advocacy, including many historical UN documents about women.

In the 1960s, concrete evidence began to build demonstrating that women were disproportionately affected by poverty. As a response, the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) focused its discussions on "women's needs in community and rural development, agricultural work, family planning and the impact of scientific and technological advances."¹⁴ Hoping to consolidate standards on women's rights as they had been developed since 1945, the General Assembly (GA) requested in 1963 that the CSW draft a Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. Adopted by the GA in 1967, this declaration highlighted the need for a legally binding convention that defined women's rights, out of which emerged the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The Convention was ultimately adopted in 1979.¹⁵

In 1972, the Commission recommended that 1975 be designated as International Women's Year, an observance which was intended to "remind the international community that discrimination against women, entrenched in law and deeply rooted cultural beliefs, was a persistent problem in much of the world."¹⁶ The hallmark World Conference of the International Women's Year was held in Mexico City. It was

the first world conference which provided a set of guidelines for the advancement of women for the next decade. As a follow-up action, the United Nations declared 1976-1985 the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development, and Peace,¹⁷ a decade which included two more global conferences, first in Copenhagen (1980), and then in Nairobi (1985).

After the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi (1985), the World Council of Churches promoted an Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women. This 10-year program was established in 1988 as a means to challenge churches not only to examine their structures, teachings and practices as they related to women but also to make a commitment to the full participation of women. The Ecumenical Decade focused on themes such as women's participation in the work and life of churches, violence against women in church and society, and global economic injustice and racism as related to the lives of women.¹⁸

Ten years passed between the Third World Conference on Women and the Fourth, which was held in Beijing in 1995. Regarded by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women as "one of the greatest achievements of the Commission on the Status of Women," the Fourth World Conference on Women significantly advanced the agenda for women's rights and gender equality on a global scale. Along with the related NGO Forum in nearby Huairou, it was the "largest gathering of government, NGO, and media representatives ever held for a UN conference" — more than



36,000 participants — and it was completely devoted to women.¹⁹ The outcome document of the conference is called the Beijing Platform for Action (See box p. 29). The production of this outcome document was especially significant because of the challenge in drafting it; a wide variety of viewpoints on issues such as family planning and reproductive health made consensus at times difficult, if not impossible.

Throughout the spring of 1995, the churches, along with other NGOs,²⁰ criticized the movement of the NGO part of the Forum to Huairou, 50 km outside the inter-governmental deliberations in Beijing. They also advocated on behalf of women from Tibet and Taiwan who were not given visas because of their pro-choice and feminist agendas. In statements, actions and official interventions at the UN

Conference, women of faith offered insights and correctives throughout the drafting process of the Declaration and the Platform for Action. One example is “A Statement on Gender by Communities of Faith,” which was submitted as a joint effort endorsed by the Anglican United Nations Office, the World Council of Churches, the Christian Peace Conference and the United Church Board for World Ministries.

During this conference in Beijing, a strong delegation of “Ecumenical Women United” included the following organizations: Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women, The Lutheran World Federation, The World Council of Churches, World Union of Catholic Women, World Alliance of Reformed Churches (now the World Communion of Reformed Churches), World Student Christian

Their message spoke powerfully to
“the positive and negative role religion
can play in women’s lives”

Federation, World Young Women’s Christian Association, World Federation of Methodist Women, and World Vision International.²¹

The Beijing Platform for Action was adopted by consensus by the 189 countries represented at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. At the time, it was considered to be the “most comprehensive document on women’s rights ever agreed upon by governments.”²² In response, the “Religious Right,”²³ a coalition initiated within the United States of America, vocally determined that the Beijing Platform for Actions was “one of the most radical documents you can imagine.” In her article about the meetings, Jennifer Butler, then Director of the Presbyterian United Nations Office (now the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations) and a member of the ecumenical delegation wrote:

Austin Ruse, Director of the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute, sent out a call to action. In his rallying cry, Ruse summoned hundreds of “pro-family and pro-life advocates” to come to the UN to fight against the Beijing Platform

for Action ... His call took on biblical proportions as he promised his people, “You will work alongside Catholics, Evangelicals, Jews, Muslims, Mormons.... We are the children of Abraham,” claimed Ruse, “arising to fight for faith and family.”

At the Preparatory Committee for the Beijing Plus Five Special Session of the General Assembly meeting from March 3-18th, 1999, scores of lobbyists wearing red buttons emblazoned with the word “motherhood” swarmed the room where government delegations were gathering. While conservative and pro-life groups have attended other United Nations events, their numbers at this meeting were far greater than ever before. They were highly visible among the 1,700 NGO representatives and appeared to have reached their goal of having at least 300 participants.²⁴

It was in this heated environment that the current Ecumenical Women at the United Nations was founded. The coalition worked to counteract the rising tide of negative public sentiment

against the Conference, which was often deemed as “anti-family” because it advocated women’s rights to education, equality with men in decision making, fair employment, family planning, and reproductive health. At its founding, the Ecumenical Women Network consisted of Church Women United, Church World Service and Witness Unit, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) – UN Office, US National Council of Churches of Christ, United Church of Christ Coordinating Center for Women, and Women of Reform Judaism.²⁵

They joined forces under the platform that “family life,” which was mentioned over 70 times in the outcome document, would only be strengthened when women are:²⁶

- More educated
- Healthier and better able to care for their children
- Treated equally with men at home and at work
- Given an equal say with men in making decisions
- More informed about reproductive health and family planning
- Not sexually oppressed, as in prostitution, forced marriages or sexual violence

Rooted firmly in their denominational bodies and an ecumenical tradition of working

together for change at the United Nations, women delegates of Ecumenical Women voiced their absolute support of the Beijing Platform for Action. Their message spoke powerfully to “the positive and negative role religion can play in women’s lives,” and “their witness to the international community whereby religion and culture can and are being transformed in favor of gender equality.”

Since its founding, Ecumenical Women has grown in numbers and strengthened its purpose. We have trained over 1,000 women in advocacy for women’s rights, have deepened our theological lens on gender justice, have launched a website, and have become increasingly strategic in our advocacy at the Commission on the Status of Women. At the time of this writing coalition membership has grown to 18 organizations. To see a complete list of Ecumenical Women member organizations, visit www.EcumenicalWomen.org/about.

Ecumenical Women continues to fulfill an extraordinary legacy by advocating for gender equality at the United Nations and through all of its delegates around the world. Together, denominational representatives actively pursue the creation of national and international policies which challenge structures of inequality. Members of Ecumenical Women advocate

not only for a few improvements but for a fundamental system change in church and state to invest in and empower women worldwide. It is our understanding that the church at its best can be a center that models policies that reinforce gender equality, creates budgets that reflect a desire to invest in women's equality, and which develops networks of women and men who resist systems of patriarchy, domination, and abuse. We believe that the church is a powerful transformative vehicle for

Ecumenical Women works hard to continue the tradition of advocating for both a liberative gospel and a society where women are free to make choices over their health, their lives, their jobs, and their status in society.

the teaching, protection, and enforcement of women's rights and gender equality when its constituents and leadership are informed and empowered.

Ecumenical Women acknowledges that theology can oppress or it can liberate its adherents, and our attention continues to focus on the most vulnerable. In recent years, Ecumenical Women has invested in efforts to bring partners from the global South. The Coalition works hard to continue the tradition of advocating for both a liberative gospel and a society where women are free to make choices about their health, their lives, their jobs, and their status in society.

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- ¹ Jain Devaki, *Women, Development and the UN: A Sixty-year Quest for Equality and Justice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 10.
- ² YWCA – USA. "History." Accessed September 17, 2015. <http://www.ywca.org/site/c.culRJ7NTKrLaG/b.7515891/k.C524/History.htm>
- ³ Hikka Pietilä, *The Unfinished Story of Women and the United Nations* (Geneva: UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service, 2007), 4.
- ⁴ United Nations Department for the Advancement of Women. "Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women." Accessed September 17, 2015. 1. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/CSW60YRS/CSWbriefhistory.pdf>
- ⁵ Church Women United, *Information Handbook and Directory: September 1998 through August 1999*. 11.
- ⁶ Jain Devaki, *Women, Development and the UN: A Sixty-year Quest for Equality and Justice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 12-13.
- ⁷ United Nations Department for the Advancement of Women. "Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women." Accessed September 17, 2015. 1. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/CSW60YRS/CSWbriefhistory.pdf>
- ⁸ United Nations Department for the Advancement of Women. "Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women." Accessed September 17, 2015. 2. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/CSW60YRS/CSWbriefhistory.pdf>
- ⁹ Jain Devaki, *Women, Development and the UN: A Sixty-year Quest for Equality and Justice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 31.
- ¹⁰ Dennis Frado, "Human Rights from the perspective of recent Lutheran experiences" (presentation, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, PA, January 7, 2008).
- ¹¹ Jain Devaki, *Women, Development and the UN: A Sixty-year Quest for Equality and Justice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 19-20.
- ¹² World Council of Churches, *The Role of the World Council of Churches in International Affairs* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1999), 31.
- ¹³ The Ecumenical Team to the UN Commission on the Status of Women, *Report to the WCC Member Churches Concerning the 42nd Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women* (1998). 4.
- ¹⁴ "Mia Adjali," Challenging Structures, Promoting Dignity (blog), recorded interview/video. Accessed September 17, 2015. <http://humanrightschurch.org/main-page/>
- ¹⁵ United Nations Department for the Advancement of Women. "Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women." Accessed September 17, 2015. 7. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/CSW60YRS/CSWbriefhistory.pdf>
- ¹⁶ United Nations Department for the Advancement of Women. "Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women." Accessed September 17, 2015. 8. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/CSW60YRS/CSWbriefhistory.pdf>
- ¹⁷ *ibid.*
- ¹⁸ United Nations Department for the Advancement of Women. "Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women." Accessed September 17, 2015. 9. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/CSW60YRS/CSWbriefhistory.pdf>
- ¹⁹ The Ecumenical Team to the UN Commission on the Status of Women, *Report to the WCC Member Churches Concerning the 42nd Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women* (1998). 4.
- ²⁰ United Nations Department for the Advancement of Women. "Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women." Accessed September 17, 2015. 15. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/CSW60YRS/CSWbriefhistory.pdf>
- ²¹ Jennifer Butler, "300 Religious Right Participants Attend Beijing PrepCom," *Global Policy Forum*, last modified June 1, 2000, <https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/177/31727.html>.
- ²² "Religious Right." *Dictionary.com*. Accessed on September 17, 2015. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/religious+right>.
- ²³ Jennifer Butler, "300 Religious Right Participants Attend Beijing PrepCom," *Global Policy Forum*, last modified June 1, 2000, <https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/177/31727.html>.
- ²⁴ *ibid.*
- ²⁵ U.S Ecumenical Women's Network, *Empowering Women of Faith to be Instruments of Justice and Equality Everywhere* (1995).





Part II

Theological Foundation for Gender Justice and Advocacy

“Attempting to bridge secular and faith-based women is very important. Women of faith feel that the rights movement is anti-religion, and the rights activists haven’t made enough effort to listen to include the women of faith. The social justice movement needs both voices. We need to be able to move to the next step, a dialogue between the rights world and the religious world.”

- Dorothy Q. Thomas

Theological Statement

Ecumenical Women, as a part of a global community that is grounded in faith and committed to justice, affirm God's preferential option for the marginalized and that Jesus has confirmed God's will that the world "may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). We envision a human community where the participation of each and every one is valued, where no one is excluded on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, age, ability or religion and where full diversity is celebrated as God's gift to the world.

Within our Biblical interpretation, Jesus' ministry of healing and community with women and other marginalized peoples, indicates a deep respect for and equality with women of all ages. Though the world does not yet reflect his actions, our theology compels us to stand with the God of the oppressed and work to see the words of Jesus' prayer become a reality, that "...God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt.6:10b). Many women and girls are not able to participate in the world's abundance the same way that men and boys are accorded. Many women and girls are excluded from access to rights, resources, services and protection, including economic opportunities, labor rights, health services, land and – most crucially – education. Women do not yet have equal fulfillment of civil and political

nor economic, social and cultural rights anywhere in the world. Women living in poverty and from indigenous and minority ethnic backgrounds are the most excluded.

Ecumenical Women embraces a theology that understands God's church is without walls and when at its best, can be a center which models policies that reinforce gender equality, creates budgets which reflect a desire to invest in women's equality, and which develops networks of women and men who resist systems of patriarchy, domination and abuse. We believe that the church is a powerful transformative vehicle for the teaching, protection and enforcement of women's rights, gender justice and equality when its constituents and leadership are informed and empowered. We gladly accept as the foundation and fuel to our advocacy work, the biblical mandate and moral imperative given by the prophet Micah. This sacred job description outlines what is truly required of us as people of faith and ethical consciousness, "...to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God."(Micah 6:8)

Part III

Advocacy and Gender Justice

“We talk religion in a world that worships the bread but does not distribute it, that practices ritual rather than righteousness, that confesses but does not repent.”

~ Joan Chittister

Foundations

Founded just after World War II, the United Nations (UN) is a system that remains a mystery for many people. Still even more obscure to many is the fact that churches have played a critical role in shaping the UN agenda.²⁸ This was highlighted briefly in the history section of this advocacy guide, but how the process of shaping the agenda or influencing change *actually works* will be explained in the following section.

WHAT IS THE UNITED NATIONS?

With the scourge of war heavy on people's hearts and minds following World War II, 51 countries met to create the United Nations in San Francisco, where they drafted and signed its Charter. In turn, when these 51 countries signed the Charter on October 24, 1945, they became *member states* of the United Nations by committing their governments and peoples to "maintain international peace and security" as well as the other purposes and principles. When *states* become *members* of the United Nations, they agree to accept the many obligations of the UN Charter.

A common misunderstanding is that the UN is a director of action or that it has power over states. Much like an elected representative of your city represents a constituency and

makes decisions about laws and legislation on its behalf, so too does this happen (in many different ways) at the international level. Governments draft, debate and vote for or against treaties, conventions or action plans discussed at the UN. (Much of the work of the UN, like the CSW, sets normative frameworks, advancing global thought and priorities.)

In addition, the entire budget for the United Nations is financed by both dues and voluntary contributions from member states. Including the last member state to be added (South Sudan, July 14, 2011) there are 193 member states in the United Nations. This includes all "fully recognized independent states," not including the Holy See and the State of Palestine which are only allowed observer status (speaking rights but no voting rights). Working with such a diversity of peoples requires a large full-time translation and interpretation team, and the UN works in six official languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

There are five major active organs of the United Nations: the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly, the International Court of Justice, the Secretariat and the Security Council. These bodies all meet in New York, except for the International Court of Justice, which is located in The Hague, Netherlands.

PURPOSE OF THE U.N.

- Freedom from want, freedom from fear
- Support international cooperation to solve economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian problems
- Maintain international peace and security
- Promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms

1. UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Meeting annually, the General Assembly (GA) is the main deliberative body of the UN with all 193 member states having one equal vote. Each year, a new member state is elected as president of the GA. The GA is made up of various committees which make recommendations on issues relevant to those committees as well as to various programs, funds, and training institutes. Another important subsidiary body to the GA is the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). Today, the UNHRC (also run by member states) has the mandate and authority to make recommendations to the GA about reported situations of human rights violations.

When GA member states vote on important questions (for example: UN elections, peace and security issues, or admitting new members), a motion will pass only with a two-thirds majority. For all other questions, decisions are made by a majority vote. With each member state allowed one vote, it would seem that the GA is the most democratic and potentially powerful international body in the world. However, none of the resolutions passed here are binding

except for internal UN and budgetary matters. Two examples include the creation of the Human Rights Council and the Millennium Development Goals. In terms of the situations of human rights violations mentioned above, the GA member states can only advise the Security Council to take action.

2. SECURITY COUNCIL

The function of the Security Council is to maintain peace and security among countries. There are 15 member states that participate on the Council; of those, five are permanent members (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and the United States) and ten are non-permanent members elected for two-year terms. Whereas the GA could only make recommendations, the Security Council is the only place where legally binding decisions are made. Under the terms of the Charter, Article 25 is clear that "members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council."

An imbalance of power is often cited because the five permanent members hold "veto power" which allows them to block the adoption (but

not the debate) of a resolution. This means that if a permanent member engages in a war not approved by the Security Council, the other members of the Security Council will be unable to pass a resolution condemning the actions of that permanent member. In short, while the actions of the state are considered to be breaking the conditions of agreement with the UN Charter, it is one of only two UN entities that have the authority to pass a resolution to effectively stop the actions of the state. (The other is the International Court of Justice, although the Security Council must enforce its decisions.)

In the year 2000, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. By doing so, member states affirmed the role of women in preventing and resolving conflicts. It calls on member states “to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict.” This was a landmark resolution that women and men around the world celebrated. In 2008, the Security Council passed Resolution 1820 on sexual violence. This resolution declared that “rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide.”

3. SECRETARIAT

This is the only organ of the United Nations wherein member states do *not* make up the core “staff.” In fact, the nearly 9,000 civil servants provide studies, information and facilities as requested by the other UN organs. The head of this body is the United Nations Secretary General, whose duties include resolving international disputes, administering peacekeeping operations, organizing conferences, gathering information on the implementation of Security Council decisions, and consulting with member states.

4. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (ECOSOC)

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) assists the General Assembly in “promoting international economic and social cooperation and development.” In doing so, this body serves as the central UN forum for discussing social issues and formulating policy. Its work is divided into regional and functional (topical) commissions, such as the Commission on the Status of Women. Much like the GA, ECOSOC has little authority to “force action”; however, some member states have attempted to strengthen some of its policy responsibilities.

Additionally, ECOSOC was the organ that authorized the creation of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS).

HISTORY OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS AT THE UN

- 1945** UN Charter
- 1946** Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) established
- 1948** UN Declaration of Human Rights
- 1975** International Women's Year
- 1975** First World Conference on Women, Mexico City
- 1976-1985** UN Decade for Women
- 1976** International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) established
United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM) established
- 1979** Convention on the Elimination on All Forms of Discrimination against Women CEDAW) adopted
- 1980** 2nd World Conference on Women, Copenhagen
- 1985** 3rd World Conference on Women, Nairobi
- 1995** 4th World Conference on Women, Beijing China
- 2000** 23rd Special Session of the GA on Women, Equality, Development and Peace (Beijing+5)
- 2000** UN Millennium Development Summit Security Council Resolution 1325 adopted on Women, Peace and Security
- 2008** Security Council Resolution 1820 adopted on Sexual Violence
- 2009** Security Council Resolutions 1888 and 1889 adopted, calling for peacekeeping missions to protect women and girls from sexual violence and for improvement in women's participation in peace processes, respectively
- 2010** Security Council Resolution 1960 adopted on Women, Peace and Security
- 2011** United Nations Entity for Gender Equity and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), established by the General Assembly in 2010, becomes operational
- 2013** Security Council Resolutions 2106 and 2122 adopted on Women, Peace and Security
- 2015** Security Council Resolution 2242 adopted on Women, Peace and Security
- 2015** Adoption of A/RES/70/1 – Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Without real people, the words of policies would be empty.

Created in 1994 and operating since 1996, UNAIDS brings together the UN's existing AIDS-related work, expertise and resources into one consolidated program that enhances cooperation between the World Health Organization, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNESCO and the World Bank. This joint program and interagency project eliminated duplicated efforts and enhanced the global response to the AIDS pandemic. Civil society representatives serve as board members of UNAIDS.

The 54 member states of ECOSOC are elected for three-year terms by the member states of the General Assembly. Part of the overall mandate of ECOSOC allows the organ to grant nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) accreditation for access to attend (and influence) United Nations meetings. Because of this, our denominations, agencies and bodies have access to meetings at the United Nations.

UN WOMEN

In July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly created UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. In doing so, UN Member States took an historic step in accelerating the Organization's goals on gender equality and the empowerment of women

The creation of UN Women came about as part of the UN reform agenda, bringing together resources and mandates for greater impact. It merges and builds on the important work of four previously distinct parts of the UN system, which focused exclusively on gender equality and women's empowerment:

- Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)
- International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)
- Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI)
- United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

The main roles of UN Women are:

- To support inter-governmental bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, in their formulation of policies, global standards and norms.
- To help Member States to implement these standards, standing ready to provide suitable technical and financial support to those countries that request it, and to forge effective partnerships with civil society.
- To hold the UN system accountable for its own commitments on gender equality,

including regular monitoring of system-wide progress.

Read more about UN Women at www.unwomen.org

FAITH-BASED ADVOCACY FOR GENDER EQUALITY

As Christians, we know and experience the power of the word. Jesus said, *“And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold” (Mark 4:20)*. In this parable of the sower, Jesus taught us about the power of God’s word to multiply and even bear enormous fruit. We know that *the sower sows the word* (Mark 4:14) by speaking it or reading it or living it.

At the United Nations, most of our work revolves around words. Some of these words fill binding legal conventions, resolutions and treaties; most of them do not. Instead, they fill recommendations, reports, press releases, statements and, perhaps most poignantly of all, real human stories of gender inequality, poverty, war, human rights violations, destruction and death. It is because of these human stories that recommendations are made for national and international policy change. Without the words of real people, the words of policies would be empty.

It is because of these statements of public witness that platforms for action are created. In 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women took place in Beijing, China, and over 36,000 women from around the world attended in order to make the lives and stories of women heard.²⁹ The result was the adoption by governments of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), which set forth critical areas of concern as a guide for improving the lives of women.³⁰

The recommendations set forth in this document are full of critical and powerful words which reflect the lives and experiences of women from around the world. While the Platform “may not legally be binding, we will make it politically binding,” urged Charlotte Bunch, director of the Center for Women’s Global Leadership, at a follow-up event. Joining her and many other organizations, Ecumenical Women advocates that the powerful words of the BPFA become action.

When engaging in advocacy efforts during UN meetings, it is important not to be shy, because governments should also hear from religious, moral, and ethical perspectives. Member states are generally very willing to meet with faith-based representatives, especially when the delegation represents a global perspective. There are even examples of meetings with



The United Nations System



UN Principal Organs

General Assembly

Security Council

Economic and Social Council

Secretariat

International Court of Justice

Trusteeship Council

Subsidiary Organs
Main and other sessional committees
Disarmament Commission
Human Rights Council
International Law Commission
Standing committees and ad hoc bodies

Funds and Programmes¹
UNDP United Nations Development Programme
• UNCDF United Nations Capital Development Fund
• UNV United Nations Volunteers
UNEP⁸ United Nations Environment Programme
UNFPA United Nations Population Fund
UN-HABITAT⁹ United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund
WFP World Food Programme (UN/FAO)

Research and Training
UNIDIR United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research
UNITAR United Nations Institute for Training and Research
UNSSC United Nations System Staff College
UNU United Nations University

Other Entities
ITC International Trade Centre (UN/WTO)
UNCTAD^{1,8} United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNHCR¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOPS United Nations Office for Project Services
UNRWA¹ United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UN-Women¹ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

Related Organizations
CTBTO Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization
IAEA^{1,3} International Atomic Energy Agency
ICC International Criminal Court
ISA International Seabed Authority
ITLOS International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea
OPCW^{3,5} Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
WTO^{1,4} World Trade Organization

Subsidiary Organs
Counter-terrorism committees
International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR)
International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY)
Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals (MICT)
Military Staff Committee

Peacekeeping operations and political missions
Sanctions committees (ad hoc)
Standing committees and ad hoc bodies

Advisory Subsidiary Body
Peacebuilding Commission

HLPF High-level Political Forum on sustainable development

Functional Commissions
Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice
Narcotic Drugs
Population and Development
Science and Technology for Development
Social Development
Statistics
Status of Women
United Nations Forum on Forests

Regional Commissions⁸
ECA Economic Commission for Africa
ECE Economic Commission for Europe
ECLAC Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ESCAP Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ESOWA Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Other Bodies
Committee for Development Policy
Committee of Experts on Public Administration
Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations
Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
UNAIDS Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNEGN United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

Specialized Agencies 1,5
FAO Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
ICAO International Civil Aviation Organization
IFAD International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO International Labour Organization
IMF International Monetary Fund
IMO International Maritime Organization
ITU International Telecommunication Union
UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNIDO United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNWTO World Tourism Organization
UPU Universal Postal Union
WHO World Health Organization
WIPO World Intellectual Property Organization
WMO World Meteorological Organization
World Bank Group 7
• IBRD International Bank for Reconstruction and Development Association
• IDA International Development Association
• IFC International Finance Corporation

Departments and Offices
EOSG Executive Office of the Secretary-General
DESA Department of Economic and Social Affairs
DPS Department of Field Support
DGACM Department for General Assembly and Conference Management
DM Department of Management
DPA Department of Political Affairs
DPI Department of Public Information
DPKO Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DSS Department of Safety and Security
OCHA Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

OHCHR Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OIOS Office of Internal Oversight Services
OLA Office of Legal Affairs
OSAA Office of the Special Adviser on Africa
PSO Peacebuilding Support Office
SRSG/CAAC Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
SRSG/SVC Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict
UNISDR United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

Research and Training
UNICRI United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute
UNIRISD United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
UNODA United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs
UNODC¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNOG United Nations Office at Geneva
UN-OHRLLS Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States
UNON United Nations Office at Nairobi
UNOP² United Nations Office for Partnerships
UNOVO United Nations Office at Vienna

International Court of Justice

Trusteeship Council⁶

Notes:

- All members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB).
- UN Office for Partnerships (UNOP) is the UN's focal point vis-à-vis the United Nations Foundation, Inc.
- IAEA and OPCW report to the Security Council and the GA.
- WTO has no reporting obligation to the GA, but contributes on an ad hoc basis to GA and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) work on, inter alia, finance and development issues.
- Specialized agencies are autonomous organizations whose work is coordinated through ECOSOC (intergovernmental level) and CEB (inter-organizational level).
- The Trusteeship Council suspended operation on 1 November 1994, as on 1 October 1994 Palau, the last United Nations Trust Territory, became independent.
- International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) and Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) are not specialized agencies but are part of the World Bank Group in accordance with Articles 57 and 63 of the Charter.
- The secretariats of these organs are part of the UN Secretariat.

This Chart is a reflection of the functional organization of the United Nations System and for informational purposes only. It does not include all offices or entities of the United Nations System.

missions that end in prayer, at the ambassador's own suggestion!

THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Since its inception in 1946, the UN Commission on the Status of Women meets annually for a period of ten working days (usually in late February–early March) to “evaluate progress on gender equality, identify challenges, set global standards and formulate concrete policies [recommendations] to promote gender equality and advancement of women worldwide.”

The primary outcome of the Commission is a set of “agreed conclusions” which contain an

analysis of the annual priority theme as well as concrete recommendations for governments, intergovernmental bodies, and civil society to implement at the international, national, regional, and local levels.

The first draft of the agreed conclusions is ready before the meeting even begins. The language and wording of the agreed conclusions are discussed, debated, and decided upon during the second week of the Commission. In total, Ecumenical Women and other civil society participants have ten days to suggest language (sentences, words, paragraphs, recommendations) for governments to propose for discussion and inclusion in the final document. There is much preparation and a few strategies involved in order for Ecumenical Women to effectively engage in this process.

THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION: 12 CRITICAL AREAS

Women and Poverty
Education and Training of Women
Women and Health
Violence against Women
Women and Armed Conflict
Women and the Economy
Women in Power and Decision-making
Institutional Mechanism for the Advancement of Women
Human Rights of Women
Women and the Media
Women and the Environment
The Girl-child

UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1325

The United Nations Security Council adopted resolution (S/RES/1325) on women, peace and security on 31 October 2000. This landmark resolution reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction. It also stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. Resolution 1325 urges all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives into all United Nations peace and security efforts. It also calls on all parties to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict. The resolution provides a number of important operational mandates, with implications for Member States and the entities of the United Nations system.

Resolution 1325 has four main pillars – Participation, Protection, Prevention and Relief Recovery. Resolution 1325 was followed by other related resolutions, including 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122 and 2242 . In 2014, a global study on the implementation of 1325 was commissioned by the UN Secretary General, resulting in the Global Study, titled “Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace.” The study’s findings and recommendations emphasize that prevention of conflict must be a priority, that women’s participation is key to sustainable peace and that holding perpetrators account-

able to crimes committed is key in addressing impunity. It also addresses the persistent lack of funding and calls on the for support women peacebuilders, among other recommendations. We encourage you to read the full report and to check out the NGO Working Group on the Women, Peace and Security website for more information.

UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

On September 25, 2015 Member States of the United Nations adopted Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development entitled, Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development “a plan of action for people, planet, prosperity and partnership” . This global agenda aims to achieve sustainable development over the next 15 years. The agenda sets forth 17 new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets that build on the concluded Millennium development Goals (MDGs). The SDGs were developed by UN member States in consultation with civil society. The overarching goal is to eradicate poverty in all its forms, fight inequalities, achieve gender equality, tackle diseases and climate change and have peaceful societies and effective institutions --the bottom line being “leaving no one behind”. One distinction between the MDGs and SDGs, of note, is that the new SDG framework is universal in application. This means that all member states are accountable to their achievement. The MDGs focused, conversely, on 20 Least Development Countries (LDCs).

Women’s rights and women’s empowerment are at the centre of the Agenda 2030. SDG 5 is



a stand-alone goal on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Additionally, gender considerations are mainstreamed throughout the other 16 SDGs. This fact, in tandem with the universal application of this framework, will look at gender justice in all forms everywhere.

Implementation of the SDGs is voluntary by each country. Follow up and review systems have been put in place in order to monitor and report on the implementation of the 2030 agenda. The High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) will be the central follow up and review platform. National and regional reviews

will complement the global level reviews. Other functional UN commissions of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), as well as other intergovernmental bodies and forums, will also support the work of the HLPF.

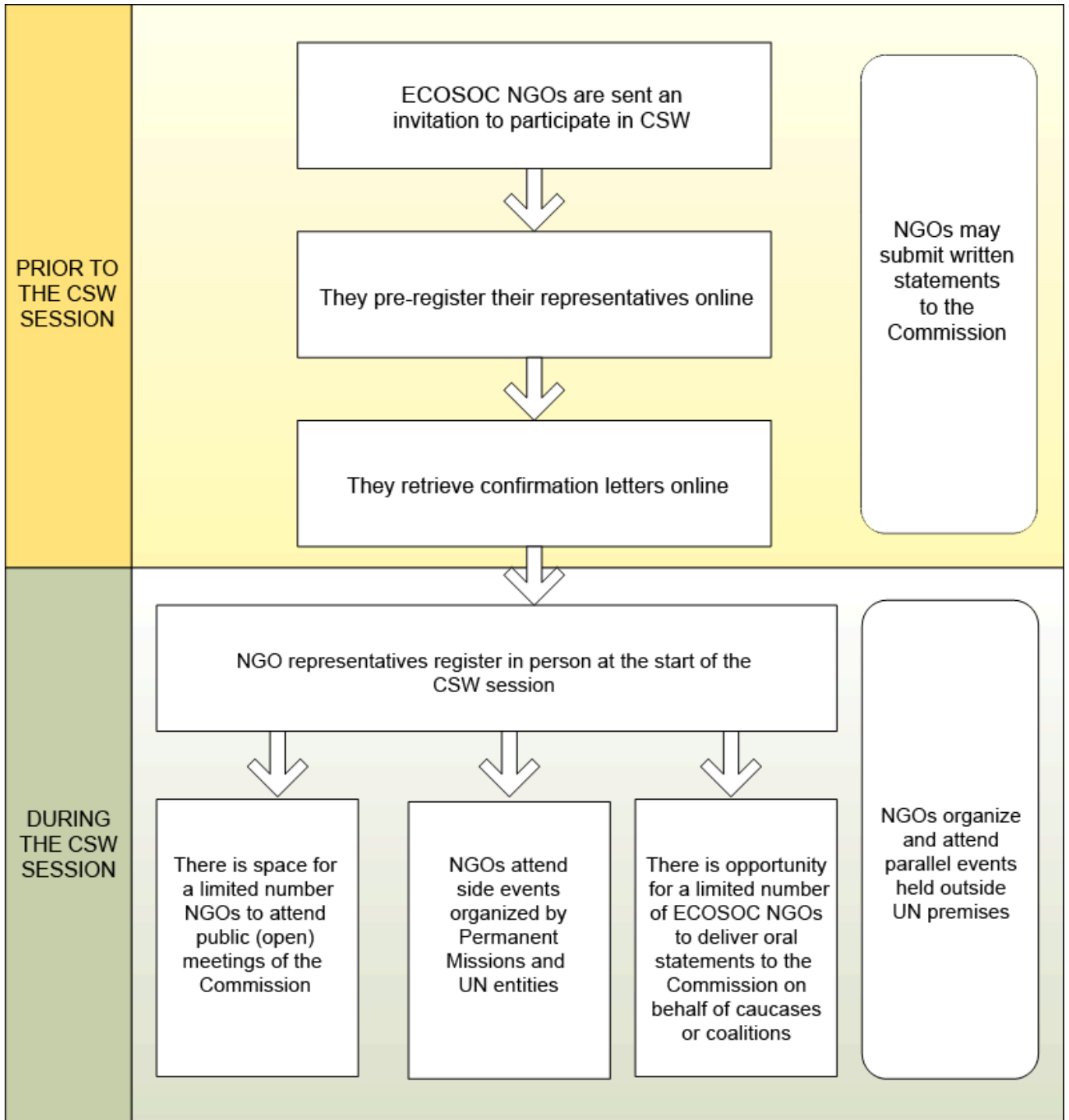
Civil society organizations including faith based organizations must fully take part in all parts of the follow up and review architecture. Implementation of the SDGs is voluntary and all member states bear the primary responsibility of implementing Agenda 2030. It is therefore important for advocates like you to monitor the country-level implementation to promote accountability.

¹ For more information about the role of churches in shaping the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, see *For All Peoples and All Nations: The Ecumenical Church and Human Rights* by John Nurser.

² Jael Silliman and Joan D. Winship, *Bringing Beijing Back: Local Actions and Global Strategies* (Muscatine: The Stanley Foundation, 1995). 5.

³ See "Beijing Platform for Action" at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>.

⁴ More about the CSW: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw>



United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

BEFORE CSW: PREPARING OUR ADVOCACY MESSAGE

Each year, Ecumenical Women begins preparing for CSW at least six months in advance. Because the CSW priority theme is known, we can begin preparing our advocacy statement. The advocacy statement is a 2-3 page document that includes a short analysis of the theme and concrete policy recommendations. This statement is drafted and reflects policy statements of member denominations, church agencies, and organizations of Ecumenical Women.

In the process of researching and developing this statement, we are also able to analyze and compare the strengths and weaknesses of our own church policies. For example, after preparing a statement on caregiving and HIV and AIDS, members of Ecumenical Women might reconsider the recognition, roles, and treatment of caregivers in our own national church strategies.

Ecumenical Women's advocacy statement pulls the strongest points and experiences of all of the member organizations into one solid document that reflects the wide range of experiences and recommendations of churches (and women) from around the world. The advocacy statement is signed by a coalition of Ecumenical Women with ECOSOC status,

submitted to the United Nations as an official document for the meeting, and it is translated into the six official UN languages. With the recommendations in our advocacy statement, the representatives of Ecumenical Women prepare our list of policy recommendations during CSW.

DURING THE CSW: INFLUENCING THE AGREED CONCLUSIONS

Since the year 2000, Ecumenical Women has hosted a delegation of women and men from around the world who participate in CSW. At the time of this writing, the delegation has numbered almost 200 people. Typically, the delegation is made up of women and men who are in leadership positions within their denominations as well as a strong contingent of youth. Often, it is the first and only time for delegates to attend a UN meeting; others are experienced with these types of international meetings.

Before the CSW begins, Ecumenical Women organizes an orientation and advocacy training for all delegates. There are three main ways we engage in advocacy: meeting with delegates, working in coalitions, and writing and submitting our preferred language for the agreed conclusions.

1. Meeting with government delegates

Ambassadors are governmental representatives attending the CSW meeting. Most of them are men, but there are a good number of women present, especially during CSW. Sometimes governments send ministers such as the Minister of Gender and Development or a Minister of Health, depending on the CSW priority theme. All of them are representatives of the government and receive their “orders” or decisions about policies from their capitals before and during the meeting. This is an important point to remember, as the advocacy of Ecumenical Women can only be as effective as our work in the capitals of our countries. The global reach of churches, rooted in the local but connected to the global, provides an incredible opportunity for a concerted and coordinated ecumenical approach to advocacy not only at the United Nations but in capitals in nearly every country in the world.

Advocacy: The act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy.

CSW participants have ample opportunities to meet with representatives of their own governments or any country, for that matter. Some are very receptive and friendly, a few are not; some are new to CSW, some are not; most likely, all are overworked and very, very busy. Because of this, it’s important that you are prepared with what you want to say; this is called having talking points. Ecumenical Women works to provide delegates with the top points to recommend and has copies of our recommended language for delegates to share with ambassadors.

Things to remember when you approach representative of any government:

- Don’t interrupt an official meeting.
- If possible, speak with the government representative in her or his own language.
- Speak slowly and confidently; always be polite and friendly.
- Introduce yourself and Ecumenical Women.
- Share a copy of our policy recommendations.
- Bring up the talking points.
- Ask if a further meeting would be helpful (even back in your home country, following CSW).
- Ask for her or his business card.
- Thank them for their time. Finally, do know that it can be a bit nerve-racking the first time, but it does get easier and more comfortable!

There are also things to listen for when you hear a government representative give a statement. Try to get a sense of the country’s position:

- Does the representative bring up similar points to the Ecumenical Women advocacy statement?
- Does the representative seem adverse to or in alignment with some of our policy



recommendations?

- Does the representative mention successes or failures?
- Does the representative mention faith-based organizations?

Unlike many of the NGOs attending CSW, Ecumenical Women represents a broad and diverse constituency made up of every continent. Because of this, we have the possibility of reaching all 193 member states with our message. It really is an opportunity to affect the outcome of this meeting and to ensure that the voices of our sisters

(and brothers) are heard through policy recommendations.

2. Working with civil society coalitions

Caucuses form and meet throughout the CSW meeting. Some of the caucuses are based on region, as in the Latin American Caucus, and others are based on theme, as in the Youth Caucus. These are groups of women and men who represent diverse organizations and interests that come together to provide policy recommendations. The Asian Caucus would work on recommendations particular to their region, for example, and then meet with every

CSW can be very overwhelming; pace yourself, know your priorities, and be sure to take time to have coffee with a new friend.

government possible in that region. The Youth Caucus would work on recommendations to ensure the inclusion of youth and then meet with other caucuses and even governments to ensure that a youth perspective is included.

Most caucuses are open for attendance by any civil society representative, but some are closed partnerships of organizations. Ecumenical Women is a delegation so large that we generally form our own caucus, strategize together and meet with governments and other caucuses. Our delegation works to ensure that the message of Ecumenical Women is included in the recommendations of *all* of the public caucuses.

Often, a caucus will organize a meeting with a specific government. When this happens, it is very important to center the discussion on the policy recommendations for the priority theme of CSW. Before the meeting, be sure to research the country's position and laws; come prepared. If the representative says that they can do nothing, that their "orders" come from the capital, be sure to ask who to speak with in the capital and for their contact information. If possible, ask colleagues and friends at home to contact that person with a specific request about the CSW meeting. The possibilities are endless!

3. Contributing suggested language

During each CSW, Ecumenical Women targets specific governments to focus our advocacy message. We prepare a letter for these governments and include our specific policy recommendations. This "package" is then sent to the Mission of the Government and addressed to the Ambassador (or other appropriate representative). Each requires individualized letters and follow-up phone calls. Generally, a team forms within Ecumenical Women to manage the faxing and conduct follow-up calls. We hope you will consider joining the experience!

In addition, Ecumenical Women delegates are strongly encouraged to meet with government representatives throughout CSW. This means in the hallways, during your coffee break, and even during receptions. With the pointers included earlier, you can be prepared to engage in a conversation and provide our specific recommendations in person.

MAKING THE MOST OF THE CSW: PLANNING YOUR DAY

Whether it is your first time or your fifth CSW, every participant experiences an overload of the senses. It would be easy to spend all of your time running from discussion to discussion, but it's also good to think about which ones will

be effective and will allow for networking. For instance, Ecumenical Women compiles a list of all of the faith-based parallel events taking place so our coalition members can attend. Morning worship is highly energizing and a good time to touch base with the Ecumenical Women advocacy team. If there is an event that really interests you, show up early; seats fill up quickly.

OFFICIAL AGENDA

The official sessions of the CSW, held daily from 10am – 1pm and 3pm – 6pm, are filled with everything from expert presentations, to “general discussion” including speeches from member states and NGOs, to administrative reports and closed-door negotiations. You can find the official agenda or “proposed organization of work” on the UN website. We recommend attending the high-level round tables because this is where the experts on the theme give presentations, which then frame government discussion. You might also consider sitting in on some of the general discussions in order to get a sense of what governments’ positions are, but this is not always the most interesting part of the CSW. Copies of every government statement are generally placed on the side tables in the conference room; make sure to find and read the one from your government.

Most of the official sessions of the CSW that are open to passholders will be webcast live, and several EW member organizations provide screenings of these.

PARALLEL EVENTS AND SIDE EVENTS

During the first week of CSW, there are many NGO sponsored parallel events *each day*; they are held mainly in the Church Center for the United Nations. In addition, there are also UN agency and government-sponsored side events; they occur mostly in UN conference rooms. The calendar of all of these events is on the UN website. Be sure you get a handbook as it lists the times for various caucuses as well. If your government is leading or participating in a parallel event discussion, it would be an excellent opportunity to meet your ambassador and to learn more about your country’s position or initiatives.

For strategies on taking advocacy home, check out the next section of the guide.

CAUCUSES

The task of deciding which parallel events to attend can be daunting, but be sure to involve yourself in events as more than just a passive listener. The NGO caucuses can be an excellent opportunity to participate, learn about and engage in advocacy. The *Linkage Caucus* is led by some of the NGOs listed in the next

SAMPLE SCHEDULE; IT'S A MARATHON NOT A SPRINT.

8 am Ecumenical worship service in the chapel

9 am Attend NGO Briefing

10 am–1 pm High-level roundtable: watch webcast

1–1:15 pm Hurry only 15 minutes for lunch!

1:15–2:45 pm Side event in the Church Center

2:45–3 pm Talk with government delegate on her way into the official session

3–5 pm Check out a side event

5 pm Grab a coffee

5:30–6:30 pm Attend a Caucus meeting based on region or interest

7 pm Dinner and advocacy briefing with Ecumenical Women

10 pm Say a prayer and collapse into bed!

paragraph; if you are focusing on advocacy, it is highly recommended to attend this caucus. In addition, the regional caucuses are good and can even be led by you.

MORNING BRIEFINGS

Every morning (9:00 am) of every day of CSW, there are NGO briefings, led by the NGO Committee on the Status of Women. These are excellent places to learn more about what is happening specifically with the negotiations process of the agreed conclusions and to hear how you can join with others who are organizing to influence them.

MORNING WORSHIP

Morning worship (8:00 am), held in the chapel of the Church Center for the UN, is highly energizing and a good time to touch base with the Ecumenical Women advocacy team. Each day a different organization leads the worship.

MEETING OUTCOME, TAKING ADVOCACY HOME

While advocacy is a form of accompaniment which is rooted in faith and is people-centered, it does not start in the corridors of power but with people at the local level, and with their daily struggle for life, rights, equality and justice. The skills and information learned during an experience at the Commission on the Status of Women should be multiplied; share them with your community. Find your church's policy

and analyze it for strengths and weaknesses; maybe consider even making suggestions. Advocate with members of your government for stronger policies based on the recommendations and experiences during CSW. Join coalitions working on the theme, and – just like a caucus – make recommendations and attend meetings with government representatives.

Through our ongoing work and commitment at the national level, Ecumenical Women will be able to make the recommendations put forth in the final CSW agreed conclusions and even the Beijing Platform for Action politically binding. This process is slow, but it must continue. The recommendations of your church, of Ecumenical Women, and of the CSW agreed conclusions are all tools to incorporate in your work.



¹For more information about role of the churches in shaping the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, see *For All Peoples and All Nations: The Ecumenical Church and Human Rights*, by John Nurser.

²Jael Silliman and Joan D. Winship, *Bringing Beijing Back: Local Actions and Global Strategies* (The Stanley Foundation, November 1995) 5.

³Read the Beijing Platform for Action in Part IV, "Taking It Home," of this guide.

⁴About the CSW: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/index.html#about>

Taking It Home: Ongoing Action Strategies

SHARE

Ecumenical Women hopes that you will bring the hard-fought-for Beijing Platform and your experience of CSW to whatever communities you are a part of. You undoubtedly will be very excited about all you've learned and all you've seen and heard. Some of you will have official networks that sent you to CSW. Others might be alone. What often happens (no matter whether you've been sent from a group or on your own) is that people back home have not shared this experience with you—and may not share your enthusiasm. So,

- Find a group of friends who will sit with you and listen to you talk about your experience. Tell them everything!
- Then, ask them... "What should be done with this information? Who do you think I should talk with?" Think together about your congregation, your neighborhood, your town officials, your police, your state or national government. Think about schools, businesses, churches, government. Who do they know who are already working on some of these issues? Allow them to be a reality check for you; allow them to listen for those insights that are most powerful. Determine together what you should do with this information.

FIND ALLIES AND STAND IN SOLIDARITY

We hope you made some new connections with those who are from your region at the CSW. Now that you're home, reignite those relationships. You've had the same influx of information. Find out what they're thinking about next steps; what is building effective change in their community and what is not? Who are their connections and supports? What organizations? Which people? Who else should you be in touch with from their networks?

There are probably people who have been working on the ground for many years with the issues you now feel passionate about. Find the organizations, women's desks, and officials working in gender areas. Listen to them about what they're thinking and talking about. Build relationships with the activists and organizers for the issue you know needs to be addressed. See how these groups create space for dialogue with different kinds of people.

Remember, especially that those who are most affected by the issues facing us all – those who are impoverished, marginalized, refugees, migrants—are those whose perspectives and experiences are invaluable to the solutions. Make sure you are talking with and involving women from all statuses and all walks of life.

Remember, change takes a long time and is centered in relationships. Change most likely will not come in linear form. It will come in and out like a wave or a circle of going out and coming home, going out again, coming home... being changed and then continuing to advocate.

How does race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, language and national status come up in these situations? Who is invited to the table? Is there a tenants' organization? A farmworkers' organization? A water for all campaign? A group that seeks to hear the voices of those most affected by climate crisis, food crisis, hunger.... etc? Find them and listen to them, building relationships.

NURTURE YOUR SPIRIT

Scripture tells us, and we know from experience, that there are powers and principalities at work in the world which are difficult to tackle. It can be easy to lose hope—to forget to turn to the sources of our faith that nourish and sustain us, even while calling us into action.

Identify your spiritual partners; people who will hear your deep questions and pain as you go along. Seek out those places that affirm the power of God, affirm the power of life. Connect with pockets of resistance. Find people with whom you can speak about alternatives to the current ways of the world we live in for your own sake.

BUILD STRATEGY

After you've listened a lot to what's already going on, review your notes from CSW. How does the experience you had at U.N.

headquarters bring new insights or a framework that is helpful for education and advocacy in your local community? You might plan a discussion in your community now about the Beijing Platform or Ecumenical Women's talking points or statement. What about the experiences of some women who presented at CSW? Were there particular groups at CSW which might be helpful allies? Do you need to expand the people at the table? If so, do people need information or do they need invitation? Often what people most need is invitation, their experience is enough information and when it is included in the conversation a richness opens up that creates new ideas and ways forward.

ACT

After you've done all these things, it should be relatively easy to identify actions you can take together with others that potentially can improve the lives of women.

After you act, make sure you evaluate whether the action made a difference—and for whom? Who was left out? Why? Evaluate so you can continue in more and more powerful strategies for education, advocacy and strategic actions for women and girls and for the men and boys who need women to be full partners with them.

LEARN MORE

Take advantage of UN Women Sub-regional, country and liaison offices. UN women works to put in place the policies, laws, services and resources that women require to move towards equality. Find out about funding opportunities through the Fund for Gender Equality and the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. Find out how much money in your national budget is allocated specifically for the concerns of women.

Find out the topics for future themes of CSW and how you might contribute your expertise at the national or international level. Find out when your country is being reviewed under the terms of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) by visiting un.org/womenwatch. Countries that have signed and ratified the convention are reviewed every four years. When this happens, NGOs submit “shadow reports” about the status of women in their country, which influence the proceedings and keep governments accountable. Contact a UN-based advocacy office for assistance in submitting your report.

Continue on sharing your experience, building new allies, nurturing your spirit, strategizing, acting, and learning more—knowing your

Ecumenical Women sisters and brothers are doing the same—until justice rolls down like waters in every place.

A gender perspective within the church means constantly asking, “Where are the women?” Everyone can do a self-assessment of their own congregation and community. To bring gender to the church, it will take women and men constantly raising the issue, again and again and again. Here are some questions to get you started:

LEADERSHIP

Who serves on the committees; are women represented on all committees or only some? Are women on the public or outward facing committees of the church? Are there women represented as ecumenical officers, and chairpersons?

Are women sent as church representatives to the national and global forums and conferences? If they go, when they come back, are they given a public forum to share their views?

Be aware. Are women called as pastors to serve in churches in your area? If a woman pastor is not called to serve, do people know this is occurring in their community? Find out if there is a difference between how women and men in your church are being paid. If women are discriminated in region, by pay, or as pastors by not receiving a call, can you publicly name this?

How many women pastors are in your district?
How many women are studying theology? If there are few women doing this, how do you support them (e.g. scholarships, food, family support)?

Does your church provide leadership opportunities for young women? In what ways – just helping with clean up and cooking or in more substantive ways?

MONEY

How does gender impact the budget?

Is there money for programs that impact and involve women?

Are programs that benefit women and families a priority?

What is the source of income for your church?

What percentage comes from women, fundraisers, or grants established by women?

Who makes the decisions of how the church's money is allocated and spent? Are women included in this process?

Do an audit. Are women who work for the church paid equally to men?

THEOLOGY

Do your Bible studies include the women of the Bible? These stories offer richness for study and reflection, as well as address situations of domes-

GENDER ANALYSIS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Where are the women in my church? At the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa (ELCSA) a diplomatic church leader would say that they are there in the Women's League, and through the Women's Fellowship. The fundamental question, though, is how effective are these church organizations? Whose interests do they really serve?

For instance, you have the Men's League where most of the critical leadership of our church is drawn from. The reality of the situation is that the Men's League is a joke compared to the Women's League. Men are few in numbers and they do not have the same financial profile as women. Many men are outside the church. The question is, why do women continue to allow men to take up leadership responsibilities? Yes, women in my church guard their sacred space jealously. They have found ways of being themselves and doing what they want to do without male interference.

The Youth and the Young Adult League are not very significant in terms of influence in my church. This raises another question as well. How does gender relate to youth? Can youth be included or incorporated into gender discourse? Should we not expose the extent to which gender inequality/injustice affect youth as well?

Solomuzi Mabuza is an ordained Lutheran pastor in South Africa and the Advocacy and Leadership Development Coordinator within the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research at the Institute for the study of the Bible at KwaZuluNatal University. The institute promotes contextual Bible study for restoring dignity and wellbeing to the sufferers of sexual violence and their families. The campaign is based on the story of incest and rape of Tamar by her half-brother (2 Samuel 13).

tic violence, rape, and trafficking through stories like the rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-19) and Dinah (Genesis 34).

What is the gender of the language used in the pulpit? Humankind or mankind? Chairman or chairperson? What images and language are used in naming God? Can a discussion be held about this in your church?

PUBLIC CHURCH

Do you think of yourself as a public church?

Churches are actors in societies like nongovernmental organizations, nonprofits, governments, or social service organizations. If you are providing community services, you are a public church. You may already be taking action as a public church, but do you think of yourself as having a public

voice? Host a congregational discussion on this theme to see how you view yourselves.

Does your church leader speak out about issues facing the community, be it violence, environmental degradation, immigration, poverty, or HIV/AIDS? When was the last time you asked your pastor, church leader, or youth group to engage on an issue important to you?

Can you write an opinion article, using a faith voice and gender perspective, for the local paper?

Does your church or organization have a national or international advocacy office? Are you receiving their newsletter? Are you in communication with them to tell them about your priorities?



PART III ADVOCACY AND GENDER JUSTICE

Resources for Advocacy

ECUMENICAL WOMEN MEMBER RESOURCES:

ANGLICAN COMMUNION:

- Resources on Human Trafficking, Eliminating Gender-Based Violence, and Gender Budgeting: <http://iawn.anglicancommunion.org/resources.aspx>

ASSOCIATION OF PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND:

- Various resources on social issues: <http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/publications/social-issues-booklets>

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

- Documents, articles, and links on Gender Equality: <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/topics/gender-equality>

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

- A social message on gender-based violence: <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Current-Social-Writing-Projects/Gender-Violence>

THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

- Gender Justice Policy: <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-lwf-gender-justice-policy>
- A faith reflection on gender and power: <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-it-will-not-be-so-among-you-faith-reflection-gender-and-power>
- An Action Plan for Churches - "Churches Say 'No' to Violence Against Women: <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-churches-say-no-violence-against-women-action-plan-churches>

MEDICAL MISSION SISTERS:

- For resources on their missions around the world: <http://www.medicalmissionsisters.org/resources/>

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH USA

- <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/gender-justice-ministries/study/>

THE SALVATION ARMY:

- "Jesus and Justice": [http://www1.salvationarmy.org/ihq/www_ihq_isjc.nsf/0/982CF3CA7250CF080257A8A004F9333/\\$file/Jesus%20and%20Justice.pdf](http://www1.salvationarmy.org/ihq/www_ihq_isjc.nsf/0/982CF3CA7250CF080257A8A004F9333/$file/Jesus%20and%20Justice.pdf)

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST:

- Resources on Human Trafficking, Domestic Violence, Reproductive Justice and Expansive Language: http://www.ucc.org/justice_womens-issues

UNITED METHODIST WOMEN

- <http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/human-trafficking> (Human Trafficking)
- <http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/what-we-do/service-and-advocacy/mission-focus-issues/domestic-violence> (Domestic / Intimate Violence Education & Advocacy)
- <http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/racial-justice> (Racial & Gender Justice)
- <http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/environment> (Environmental Justice)
- <http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/what-we-do/service-and-advocacy/women-economic> (Economic Justice)
- <http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/maternal-child-health> Women's Health & Reproductive Justice)

- <http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/what-we-do/service-and-advocacy/mission-focus-issues> (Global Justice & Advocacy – including Global Migration, etc.)

WORLD YWCA:

- Publications on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Married Girls and Young Mothers, and Safe Spaces, among others: <http://www.worldywca.org/Resources/YWCA-Publications>

UN RESOURCES

UN WOMEN

- Publications : <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications>

Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO):

- Resources and Information on Gender: http://www.fao.org/gender/gender-home/en/?no_cache=1

UNAIDS

- Publications : <http://www.unaids.org/en/resources>

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND (UNICEF)

- Publications: <http://www.unicef.org/publications/>

UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENT FOR PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS (UN DPKO):

- Publications: <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/resources/>

UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (UNDP)

- Publications : <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage.html>

UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS (UN OCHA):

- Publications: <http://www.unocha.org/what-we-do/policy/resources>

UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND (UNFPA)

- Publications : <http://www.unfpa.org/publications>

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)

- Glossary of Gender-related terms: http://who.int/gender/mainstreaming/Gender_Manual_Glossary.pdf

Part IV

Personal Reflections on “Why theology which emphasizes gender equality is absolutely essential to real progress in the status of women around the world.”

[Personal Reflections written and submitted in 2016]

ANDRÉ S. MUSSKOPF AND MARCIA BLASI

André S. Musskopf and Marcia Blasi are Coordinators of the Gender and Religion Program at Faculdades EST, in São Leopoldo, Brazil. Both André and Marcia teach and develop research at the same institution on issues related to Gender and Sexuality in the field of Theology and participate in forum at the Lutheran World Federation and World Council of Churches. Marcia Blasi is also part of the Network of Women and Gender Justice of the Lutheran Churches in Latin America and the Caribbean members of the Lutheran World Federation.

There are many ways of understanding theology. Theology may be understood as the core of what identifies and brings together religious institutions and organizations. It may be seen as a scientific exercise of understanding and talking about God's (Theo) presence and ways of revelation in the world. It may be presented as the way peoples and communities make sense of their daily experiences in relation to God and organize their beliefs. In all those ways of understanding theology cultural, social, economic and political issues play a significant role and in many ways mark and determine theological discourses and practices that promote or hinder processes of peace and justice. As such, it is part of what constitutes and holds together the social fabric.

Most of Western Theology, which shares the epistemological framework of other disciplines and systems of knowledge and power, has been constructed on the premises that women are second class citizens and dependent on men for their recognition. Women have been defined in relation to and not as independent

and active agents. In order to create a coherent and systematic aura a particular and intentional reading of Sacred Texts has been mixed up with cultural and social prejudices and transformed into religious traditions and practices that extend from doctrinal statements to liturgical practices that reinforce such an understandings over and over.

Nonetheless, practices of theological resistance have questioned such perspectives in different contexts and times. Usually such expressions have been classified as heresy, rebellion, disobedience, unfaithfulness, indecency... representing the absence of God in particular experiences and ways of living. The power of naming those experiences, and thus classifying and demonizing them, however, has been assumed by to those who master people's daily lives in a given political and economic structure, who run religious groups and organizations and who have access to formal theological education, mostly concerned with the preservation of the right order of things and relations (status quo).

Liberation theologies from all latitudes and contexts have been significant voices that question hegemonic perspectives that rule people's lives and justify forms of oppression and violence. Such theologies have pointed precisely to the need for reevaluating the points of departure, the ways in which theology is understood and produced and its consequences in all levels of interaction (human and non-human). Feminist theologies, in their wide variety of forms and perspectives (including

ecofeminist theologies), have raised the issues regarding the ways in which religious practices and discourses have served to oppress women (and the earth) and keep them out of decision making forums, both in religious and social institutions.

Gender has been one of the analytical tools used by those theologies to make visible the differentiated and exclusive patterns that create and sustain hierarchies between men and women, but also between men and other men, and women and other women. Through critical processes and methodologies all areas and aspects of life have been and are analyzed considering the symbolic, conceptual, institutional and subjective forms that the roles created and imposed on people based on the identification of biological markers that define what is understood as sex take form. These critical analytical processes have shown the different and intersectional hierarchies grounded on gender identities and expressions and have pointed out alternatives that affirm

the need for gender equality as a fundamental ethical principle in the path for justice and peace.

The power and potential of such theologies, born in the concrete and daily struggles of those who are deemed as less valuable and worthless by unjust structures of all kinds, entertained in academic studies and embedded in institutional policies, go far beyond (although including) religious institutions and are a key element in seeking justice for women in civil and public spheres. As they question and promote change in particular religious contexts they also feed other forms of discourse and practice through constructive dialogue that takes place in interpersonal relationships and institutional exchanges at all levels. As not restricted to any particular religion they inform and affect belief systems (religious or not) that enable the envisioning of other possible worlds in which women's full citizenship is not just a matter of status but an undeniable reality.



VANESSA ANYOTI

This article is written by Vanessa Anyoti the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and GBV Program Coordinator at the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) of Tanzania.

“In the Beginning”

They often say it doesn't matter how you start, but it's the process and how you finish.

I remember all through my life in church, a Christian family and in Christian schools that the notion of gender equality was never emphasized. We were taught that we were all equal in God's eyes and that this equality was in reference to sex, age and race. But in reality, what was thought and practiced was that men were superior in all forms. And thus, the life of a woman was hard, as women were to submit to men, although we were all equal in God's eyes.

However, God chose to start his story by declaring gender equality. Genesis 1: 27 states “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (New International Version [NIV]). When I began to learn about transformative masculinity and the notion of gender equality through scripture I began to feel more comfortable with myself, my passions and my vocation. Indeed, God has roles for men and women but God considers men and women equal. God declared in Genesis 1:27 gender equality before anything else.

Why is theology which emphasizes gender equality absolutely essential to real progress in the status of women around the World you

may ask? Because there are millions of young women and girls like myself, who are strongly influenced by Christian principles, that have and live the notion that men are superior. These young women and girls have goals and dreams that they subdue to satisfy this notion. A cyclical chain develops where these young women and girls, grow up to be leaders, mothers, teachers, aunts, and the like, that carry on this notion, through word and deed, to others. These leaders, mothers, teachers, aunts and the like, are also steered into this notion by cultural contexts, existing laws and policies and the day to day reality that shows and promotes the unjust distinction between men and women. Thus women have less power over men and they themselves are often subject to abuse, discrimination, low literacy and education, lower pay and the like. This is our normal.

Faith has and continues to play a large part in my life. Growing up in a culture where religion plays a central role in most people's lives, I can only imagine what my fate would have been today if not for the strong will of my mother. To me, my mother stood for and stands for difference and gender equality. My mother is not a theologian, neither does she identify herself as a feminist or has taken extensive classes in transformative masculinity. She simply believes in equality and that God intended for gender equality regardless of what society and religion told her. I was raised to love and respect men as much as I should love and respect women. If my mother was not adamant about gender equality, she would have chosen to educate and properly care

for only my brothers and not myself and my sisters. I recall a time when pastors would make comments to the congregation i.e. "don't be fooled by this gender equality human rights stuff, it is all a trick to destroy the family and challenge Christianity. The devil is at play." Other congregation members would agree that my mother would utter loudly for others around to hear "no that's not the point he got it all wrong". I saw her as rebellious, as congregational members and other women would disagree with her, saying: "surely we came from the man's rib and we are to submit." But often we, both men and women, forget that men are called to love women, like Christ loved the church. And love does not discriminate or ostracize, it uplifts and empowers.

Thus in order to address the root causes of gender inequality, we have to begin to look at systemic issues that have led to it. In 2014, the World Demographic Profile estimated that Christians makes up 33.4% of the global population. Imagine what difference we can make in the lives of women if we can ensure that more than 2.39 billion people believe that all men and women are equal! That is an opportunity for phenomenal change. We need a bottom-up approach in tackling gender inequality and this approach can be utilized with theology. As we wait for the world to commit to attaining the Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs) in September 2015, Goals 5 aims to: achieve gender equality and empower women and girls. I couldn't be more delighted for the United Nations (UN), and the world, to take such a stance. However, I am cautious, because I know that more has to be done. We need to aim to achieve more at the grassroots level in order to address systematic issues that affect gender inequality i.e. culture and religion. Goal 5 should be the norm for all young women and girls.

What it comes down to is valuing one life over the other, and if we can't begin to promote gender equality through theology, then we cannot provide a better world for all people and in turn, we cannot claim to love and care for everyone created in the image of God. I thank God for the example of my mother, but I know others don't have that example that can challenge the norm. Thus theology ought to be able to challenge this norm of gender inequality through the use of scripture so as to provide examples to others: male and female, young and old.

At the YWCA, we are of the strong belief that faith is a liberating force. And what we work for is that there will come a time when we all fully understand and embody Galatians 3:28 " There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (NIV). These words of scripture will allow for the full realization of peace and equality among all.



ARUNA GNANADASON

Dr. Aruna Gnanadason served the World Council of Churches in various capacities, particularly in directing the programme on Women in Church and Society; and in the Justice, Peace and Creation work. She now lives in Chennai, India and offers her services to the churches and the ecumenical movement in India and globally in speaking, writing and reflecting on the role, the challenge and the alternative visions offered by religion in addressing the impact of patriarchy and global capitalism on the people and the earth

In recent times “religions” have come centre stage in our world – not always for the right reasons, however. Too often incomplete understandings of each other’s religious doctrines, teachings and practices have been at the heart of suspicion and sometimes even violence and conflict. Additionally, it is a fact that at times people within a religious group have “used” their religious views or observances to perpetuate intolerance of others. Unfortunately, a religious group that gains political power sometimes abrogates the rights of other communities and imposes legal sanctions and on how and where one practices one’s faith; what one can wear; what one can eat and most importantly on the right to propagate one’s faith

Against this back drop, where do we situate women? In a world where patriarchy defines not just economic and political structures but all social and cultural structures as well – religion has been well entrenched in patriarchy’s stranglehold. Teachings, practices and values of all religions have all been influenced by, interpreted by and used by those with

patriarchal power and this threatens to distort the central teachings of religions. Women and their rights to a life a dignity and agency are too often the target of attack – women are often deprived of their sense of self-worth and are reduced to second class status. Women and their sexuality are sometimes the victims of abuse in the name of religion. Religious texts and teachings are used to legitimise this and other forms of discrimination and even violence.

As Pierre Bourdieu, the French philosopher writes, “.....the established order, with its relations of domination, its rights and prerogatives, privileges and injustices, ultimately perpetuates itself so easily, apart from a few historical accidents, and the most intolerable conditions of existence can so often be perceived as acceptable and even natural.”¹ Religions have played a pivotal role in designing how masculine privilege is formed, “masculine domination, and the way it is imposed and suffered, is the prime example of this paradoxical submission, an effect of what I call symbolic violence, a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims.”²

It is in such a context that we speak of the urgent need for women of all religions to reimagine and reclaim the liberation motifs in religion – to unravel the values of compassion, justice, peace and love. The liberation message that lies at the heart of all religions needs to be rescued from obscurantism and religious fundamentalism. All people - women, men and other genders are made in the image of God and therefore mutuality, honouring each other

and equality in all respects is the foundation of communities of faith and of our world. The multilayered experiences of women from all cultures need to inform our reading of religious texts, rituals and doctrines and this ought to influence how political spaces are widened to include women's contributions, in the best sense. For too long we have focused on making women visible by increasing their presence in numbers - but this is not enough. An alternative feminist epistemology which is based on a commitment to transform hierarchical structures of power and injustice and to uncover the liberation potential of our cultures and religions is the way forward.

Seeking such alternatives will be incomplete without alliances with those men who have throughout the ages stood in solidarity with women. Religions have hesitated to address the potential of positive masculinities to challenge injustice. There is hope because some men are increasingly recognizing the potential of delving into questions of masculinity. I believe the image of positive masculinities is also rooted in all our faith traditions but has been suppressed by cultural, social and sometimes political forces. An exploration of positive masculinities will empower both men and women to find the more caring, nurturing side of their personalities and will contribute to a violence free and just

world for women, men and children. It will also contribute to a deconstruction of the myths surrounding claims about the hierarchical way in which society is organized and functions – with graded subjugation as the norm. The conversations among men; and among women and men; on positive masculinities will create a culture of mutual respect and interdependence and a better world for all.

Feminist theological pedagogy has to engage with the "secular" women's movements and other movements working for social transformation in order to imbibe new ways of living with each other and sharing power. It is time that we opened ourselves to genuine and compassionate dialogue among women of all faiths. Recognising how religious sentiments are used by vested interests to create a culture of fear and violence it is time for some honest and mutually critical dialogue among us as women of all faiths.

Some important achievements have been made by speaking "about gender", women's presence cannot any longer be taken lightly and all religious leaders have had to acknowledge women as a legitimate presence – we now need to "speak gender" to reclaim the potential of women offering alternative political/theological paradigms for transformation and change.



¹ Pierre Bordieu, *Prelude, Masculine Domination*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001, p.1

² *Ibid.* p.1

THE REVEREND ERIN K. SWENSON

As a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) minister, Rev. Swenson has served as pastor, counselor, chaplain, educator, and administrator within a variety of faith communities, including Adjunct Professor of Pastoral Care at Emory University's Candler School of Theology. As a transgender woman, she became the first-known mainstream Protestant minister to make a gender transition and retain ordained office. Rev. Swenson is also a licensed psychotherapist of 20 years and a board member of the Georgia Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

“A faith that does not know how to root itself in the life of people remains arid and, rather than oases, creates other deserts.”

Pope Francis commenting on the Synod Of Bishops on the Family report, October 24, 2015

I have been ordained as a Presbyterian minister for 43 years. The first 23 of those years I served as a man enjoying all of the privileges of being a white, heteronormative, middle class male. After much personal deliberation I made the decision to change my gender and for the past 20 years I have served as a female Presbyterian minister. Needless to say, this caused great distress within the Presbyterian Church.

When asked why I think theology based in gender equality is important to the status of women around the world I thought of Pope Francis' response to the recent meeting of the Synod of Bishops on the Family. He reminds us that faith must be rooted in the lives of people. The Pope reminds us how important it is that we learn new ways to express our faith in a theology that is not based in patriarchy. This is important because violence is the leading cause of death for women and girls aged 15-44. This is important because according to Amnesty International in 2003 at least 54 countries had laws that discriminated against women. This is important because trillions of dollars of women's work goes unpaid and unrecognized. This is important because if one asks a random sampling of people on the street what gender God is, 100% will likely answer that God is male.

This is not an issue confined to Catholics or Presbyterians for it reaches deep within the roots of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The discourse of these faith groups must, as a matter of survival for women, girls, and families caught in the desert of patriarchy, find new grounding within the cause of gender equality.



REVEREND PHIL V. PEACOCK

Philip Vinod Peacock is an ordained minister of the Church of North India and serves as Associate Professor at their theological college in Kolkata, India

The idea that men should be concerned about gender justice is tautological. The idea that it is a question of justice is quite simply and precisely why men should be concerned about it. The imperative towards building a just and inclusive society that ensures freedom, equality and liberty is embedded in the enlightenment values that are central to modern society. The idea that all humans have rights because they are human are integral to our society today. We struggle for gender justice then, firstly because we are humans.

For Christians though I would argue that the commitment to justice is not simply a good idea or a 'fact of modernity' but is crucial to our understanding of who God is and is a faith imperative. As Christians we express faith in a God whose heart beats the idea of justice. This is not only spoken of in the Hebrew Bible but is also the image of God who is revealed to us in Jesus Christ. And this is true of justice in all its forms, economic, social and political. The God we believe in has created all humans equals and not just equal but relationally dedicated to each other, if we are to take the two creation stories in Genesis seriously.

Moreover if we are to join Jesus in his mission of the offering of life and life in all its fullness for all the mandate of dismantling patriarchy, a demonic system that destroys the fullness of life for women, lesser men and those who

live outside the binary of gender and sexual orientation, is a faith imperative. Theologians (John Macquarrie) tell us that the difference between merely believing in God and having faith is the question of obedience. For us as Christians, and Christian men in particular, the rationale for being involved in movements for gender justice is that it is a faith imperative.

The foundation on which the theories of gender are constructed is that gender norms are neither divinely ordained nor are they biological givens but are instead social constructions. As Simone de Beauvoir has famously been known to have said, 'Women are not born, they are made'. Or in other words sex is natural and gender is cultural. Of course this foundation, that has become almost axiomatic within the women's movement has been theorized in various ways since then, culminating perhaps in third wave feminism which would really assert that it is actually the social codes of gender that influence the categories of sex.

The recognition that it is culture that is reinforced through socialization, performance and punishment that not only constructs ideas of femininity and masculinity but also perpetuates them. This structural violence of patriarchy unfortunately not only prevents women from being all that they can be but at the same time also twists men into being what they need not.

This structural violence is enforced through the subjugation and control of women's labour, sexuality and fertility through a range of institutions starting from the family, the

education system, the church and the state. This structure along with others such as race, class, ethnicity and other factors create a privileged elite while at the same time excluding others. Allocating resources to some and depriving others. This intersectionality of oppressions means that we cannot work towards a just society unless all of these are dismantled. As men, even when underprivileged by class, race and caste, we cannot expect to create a just society unless we also are committed to dismantle patriarchy. These structures of inequality feed off each other and contribute to one another. The issue of class for example not only engages with race but also means that women are also excluded from control of resources and have their productive and reproductive capacities exploited.

Finally we also find that embedded gender codes normalize patterns of behavior that are enforced through discipline and punishment. The first experience of all queer folk for example is insult and prejudice. Men who may

not feel comfortable with the codes expected of them are crushed into a particular mold of masculinity denying the individual freedom of expression. The gender binary not only socializes women to behave in certain ways and accept certain roles, including the restrictions to private spaces, subtle and not so subtle encouragement into certain professions which are often just extensions of traditional domestic roles but it also socializes men to behave in particular ways as well. This includes socialization into aggression, violence and the glorification of violence and the pressures of performance in public spheres.

The point being that gender and patriarchy twists men into being who they need not be and more importantly into being oppressors. So, apart from being involved in issues of gender justice to be in solidarity with women for the transformation of the world into a just and humane society, men need to engage with gender justice for their own salvation. Simply so that men can be human.



ELIZABETH ARCINIEGAS

Mi nombre es Elizabeth Arciniegas. Nací en un pequeño pero hermoso pueblo al norte del departamento de Boyacá, llamado El Cocuy. Siguiendo el ejemplo de mi madre, aprendí desde niña a servir en la iglesia y así lo he hecho desde diferentes espacios cumpliendo diferentes roles. Fui profesora de escuela dominical, fui parte de la directiva de la pastoral de jóvenes, y dirigí por quince años la oficina de Misión y Desarrollo de la IELCO – Iglesia Evangélica Luterana de Colombia. Actualmente trabajo con el ministerio Nacional de mujeres de IELCO y soy de la Red de Mujer y Justicia de Género. Además, soy miembro del Comité del Servicio Mundial de la FLM.

Soy una mujer evangélica Luterana, laica que ha estado cerca del trabajo con mujeres por más de 25 años. Durante este tiempo, las he visto batallar para llevar sustento a sus hogares, levantar sus hijos, y multiplicar como en un milagro sus presupuestos, con el más básico pero a la vez sabio manejo de las finanzas. Las he visto como líderes comunitarias reclamando y exigiendo puestos de salud, aulas escolares mejora de las vías etc.

Las he visto tener que luchar solas o lo que es peor en contra de sus compañeros o parejas, y de una cultura machista, que por años las ha subyugado, aun la misma religión les enseñó que la mujer, no cuenta no tiene valía, que solo vale cuando hay quien la represente; que esta es de su casa y el hombre de la calle, que lo que pasa en la casa debe quedarse en la casa; o como dicen popularmente que la ropa sucia se lava en casa.

Las he visto sufrir violencia en sus casas, ser discriminadas por su color o posición social, pero

todo eso hay que dejárselo a Dios, porque debes ser buena y humilde. Donde las oportunidades son para el varón y punto.

Pero a estas mismas mujeres las he visto aprender sobre sus derechos, como persona como mujer, han aprendido a releer la Biblia, conversar con otras mujeres de sus comunidades y ellas mismas encontrar que no es tan cierto todo aquello que un día fue ley, que cuando Jesús camino en este mundo, las dignificó, las reconoció, converso con ellas, las perdono y les quitó todas esas culpas que la cultura patriarcal puso sobre sus hombros. Que ellas fueron creadas como dice Genesis 1.27 en igualdad de valor y condiciones que los hombres. Y que eso es las buenas nuevas para ellas.

Por todo lo anterior creo con todo mi corazón que las iglesias y nuestros gobiernos tienen una deuda con las mujeres; la igualdad de género es una cuestión de fe, pues es en Cristo que ya no hay judío ni griego; no hay esclavo ni libre; no hay hombre ni mujer, porque todos vosotros y vosotras sois uno en Cristo Jesús. (Galatas 3.27-28) Creo que ahí es donde se hace tan profundamente necesaria una teología que enfatice, divulgue y promueva la igualdad de género, que ayude profundamente a las mujeres y les dé cada vez mas herramientas para que sus luchas no sean simplemente un asunto de mujeres sino que tenga como sustentar Bíblica y teológicamente sus derechos y aún las batallas del día a día.

Como hombres y mujeres de fé, estamos llamados a promover una Justicia y equidad

de género que se exprese en relaciones justas, equitativas donde el poder esté en manos de todas y todos, donde se eliminen esas formas de privilegio y opresión a favor de unos y en contra de otras.

Soy consciente que es mucho lo que necesitamos hacer y sería de gran ayuda contar con más con teólogos y teólogas que ayuden a dar luz a la transformación que el poder de Dios puede hacer en las relaciones de hombres y mujeres para un futuro más justo, más digno y más humano.

No hay duda que si las mujeres pudiéramos acceder en igualdad de condiciones a oportunidades en educación, salud, trabajo y a lugares de toma de decisión este mundo serían mucho mejor tanto para mujeres como para niños y niñas y para los mismos hombres y esto redundaría en un mayor progreso y reconocimiento de todas las mujeres alrededor del mundo.



REVEREND STEPHANIE A. DUZANT

Rev. Stephanie A. Duzant is of Caribbean American heritage with roots from the U.S. Virgin Islands and St. Martin/Sint. Maarten of the Dutch and French Antilles. She is an ordained itinerate elder with the New York Annual Conference African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. She serves as an associate minister, and the chairperson of the Social Action Ministry at St. Matthew's Community AME Church, where the Rev. Andrea M. Hargett is the pastor. Rev. Duzant earned a Master's of Divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary in NYC. Her area of focus was Biblical and Womanist studies. Rev. Duzant is also a retired Social Worker who holds a Master's of Social Work degree, with a clinical focus and specialization in Children and families from Fordham University. Rev. Duzant strives to answer God's call to help strengthen families and bring communities together.

In 2008, two weeks into my first semester in seminary, I was sitting at a red light literally feet away from my home, waiting to make a turn when a van hit the rear end of my car. That accident would alter the direction I had intended for my life. It was my plan to continue my social work career in child protection and then enter into ministry as my full time vocation. However, my body endured severe injuries as a result of the car accident including permanent nerve and lumbar damage. This compounded with an existing permanent physical condition affecting my knees and spine, made returning to a career in social work, impossible and pursuing ministry as a full time vocation, unrealistic.

During my time of treatment and recovery, my doctor only agreed to allow me to continue my classes in seminary because the seminary could accommodate me. The building was handicap accessible, the professors allowed me to

complete classwork from home when travel was too difficult, bring pillows to class for sitting, elevating my legs on chairs, and allowing me to stand up in the back of the room when the sitting became too much to bear. My will was not hindered to complete my coursework and I fought so that my access to education would not be impeded because of my injuries.

I remember people praying for me, telling me that God was going to heal me and I would no longer need that cane as they quoted scripture that says that by the stripes of Jesus I would be healed. Throughout my life, I've heard these prayers. Yet, it started to become clear to me that my injuries were not just going to disappear under the mysticism of prayer. Still, it was a very frustrating time. As a Black woman in America, with Caribbean lineage, I grew up under the mindset that you did not yield to the aches and pains of your body – you had to keep on going. You had to rise above the pain if you were going to accomplish anything. The way you rose above the pain, is trusting that God would give you the strength to keep on going. God would work miracles as long as you claimed your healing. I bought into this philosophy because I watched the women in my family operate in this faith based, “work horse mode.”

I am thankful that I was in a seminary that was liberal enough to introduce me to theologies that would speak to the parts of my spirit that had been disregarded for so long. It would be Womanist theology that would validate my agency as a Black Woman within the Christian faith. I realized that I had a right to

voice injustices found in society, the church, and within the biblical text. Eve should not be blamed for the fall of humanity, and the process of child bearing should not be seen as curse; Hannah should not have felt her barren womb negated her worth as a woman within society; the woman with an issue of blood should not have had to sneak her way to healing; and Tabitha should not have died after being sick, just to be raised from the dead, for the sole purpose of continuing to make nice tunics and do good deeds.

Seminary would also be the place I would first learn about Disability Theology. I cannot begin to say how important it was for me to learn that my wholeness in Christ, as well as my measure of faith, did not depend upon my physical condition. I stopped praying in the wrong direction. I embraced a path to wellness, since I was already healed via my salvation. Wholeness was achieved the moment I said yes to Christ. This now allowed me to be realistic about how I would view and treat my body. I had access to opportunity and access to an education that enhanced and expanded my understanding of God. I do believe that a theology that emphasizes gender equality is absolutely essential to the real progress in the status of women around the world. It is also why as an ordained elder in the African American Episcopal Church and Associate Minister for Social Justice of my local congregation, I will continue to advocate for others and embrace a theology that liberates all.

This is my story.

The thirteenth and fourteenth verses of the 139th Psalm have now become my mantra on this journey of living with a permanent disability.

¹³ For You formed my inward parts;
You covered me in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;^(b)
Marvelous are Your works,
And that my soul knows very well.

I recognize that I was born with a body that was challenged in some areas. And, I realize that life's occurrences have compromised my physical health, and created more challenges for me to endure. My soul is now aware that my disability does not make me any less marvelous. It just means that I was now marvelous in a cane walking, handicap parking, pillow toting, way. To God be all the disability accessed Glory!



THE REVEREND SOLOMUZI OCTAVIAN MABUZA

Rev. Solomuzi Octavian Mabuza is the Assistant Pastor with the Bethel Congregation, Kwa-Thema Parish, in South Africa; a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa.

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." Genesis 1:26³

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." Genesis 2:20(b)-23⁴

The two accounts of the creation narrative in the Old Testament require our attention when addressing the matter of equality for men and women. Often commentators in the public space do not always pay attention to the two traditions in this regard. From the ancient text it is clear that the two contending narratives were left in the canon for a good reason. In the 21st century our task is to find meaning in the ancient biblical text and apply it accordingly. These two opposing perspectives are actualized

in how the ecumenical and interfaith agencies address gender equality. Culture and respective traditions around the globe tend to function within these two perspectives, and this extends to our socio-political and economic environment today. The world as we know it today remains a social construct which requires interrogation and engagement from time to time.

Patriarchy is not an accident. It is a product of our shared history as humankind – a system which is entrenched across the globe and has been justified biblically. Like any other concrete reality of oppression, it compels people of faith across religions to find a working reality for the oppressed. The equality of women (and children) is not just a political matter to be dismissed by the untransformed world. It is in fact core to our survival and dignity as humankind. This is directly related to our view of creation and the manner in which we view the Creator. How do we see and understand the Creator to be and represent? Is the Creator our own imagination or construct to further an agenda which expires from generation to generation? Or is the Creator a force which is above ideology and for equality amongst all creation? Gender equality discourse must push the ecumenical agencies to seek the real face of God in the world that is dominated by patriarchy and Western Civilisation.

Theology must move closer to people and serve their needs in a manner that is not subservient

³ New International Version, Holy Bible. Zondervan.

⁴ *ibid*

to ideology. What unites humankind is their very humanity. Yes, Ubuntu will remain an ever relevant philosophy of life. "I am because you are." My existence is tied and connected to the other person. I must not be served but serve others equally. Women and children cannot remain lesser in the world. As the World Social Forum popular theme declares, "Another World is Possible" - this must become our desire. What is the use of theology if it is an instrument of keeping others under subjugation and slaves?

This is the time to promote more and more what Genesis 1:26 intended to convey to the world. It is the time to confront the ideologically bankrupt notion that men count more than women as insinuated in Genesis 2:24.

Liberated women and children will enrich the lives of men in the 21st century. We can change this, but only if we begin where we should start. Engage and critique sacred and social texts for a better world.



“Attempting to bridge secular and faith-based women is very important. Women of faith feel that the rights movement is anti-religion, and the rights activists haven’t made enough effort to listen to include the women of faith. The social justice movement needs both voices. We need to be able to move to the next step, a dialogue between the rights world and the religious world.”

- Dorothy Q. Thomas

Part V

**Essays on Transforming Theology for the
Sake of Women's Empowerment**

[Essays written and submitted in 2008]

GARDENS OF ABUNDANCE

"If you have the faith of a mustard seed ... "

There is probably no more visible, transformative, faithful act than growing a garden. Take an empty lot and add a little compost of garbage and manure and seeds. Mix sweat and labor and the transformation of tepid, bare space miraculously happens. What refreshment it gives to sit in a small garden. Gardens in the desert, rooftop, in backyards, or in our homes – wherever we go, gardens are symbols of God's gracious, sacrificing, incredibly undeserved, loving abundance.

The eight essays contained within this section are from women and men from around the world who are wrestling with both patriarchal notions of God and society found within religious bodies and also with how those notions continue to influence the normative inequality of women found everywhere around the world. The authors of these essays are each from a unique garden of thought and bring a unique style. We're all seeking an understanding of what needs to happen for that garden where each and every sister around the world is able to grow and thrive

so that her seeding and her growth will be prolific for future gardeners.

We dig and hoe and sweat and plant, watch and wait. We water and weed, we prop up the delicate stems, and prune the unnecessary branches. We turn over the soil again and again and put last year's refuse into the compost heap. We add some manure. Our sweat waters the earth, mingled with the tears of a God who we know also wants that Garden to grow, whoever She is, whoever we are, and wherever we are. We do whatever it takes because we know it is with a faithful eye that the mustard seed grows. We know that the amaryllis grows, that the lily grows, that the violet grows. We're tending a world of flowers that we have faith will grow. I hope you find richness for your own garden in these essays.

Theology in process: digging, composting, planting and transforming the world, revealing possibilities – the garden grows.

If you have faith of a mustard seed

— Rev. Kathleen Stone, Chaplain, Church Center for the United Nations

Ecumenical Women liaison

PERSPECTIVE:

GENDER ANALYSIS FOR EACH CONTEXT



About the author: Dr. Fulata Lusungu Moyo is the World Council of Churches' Program Executive for Women and a systematic theologian whose PhD work is in gender and sexual ethics. She is a national of Malawi currently working in Switzerland.

Gender refers to the social construction of female and male identity. It includes the ways in which gender differences, whether real or perceived, have been valued, used and relied upon to classify women and men and to assign roles and expectations to them. The significance of this is that the lives and experiences of women and men, including their experience of religious systems, occur within complex sets of differing social and cultural expectations.

According to Susan Frank Parsons, gender is not only an aesthetic avenue through which expressions of the human self are made, but also a path through which human relations are exposed and "dilemmas of human living revealed."¹ Our gender also contributes to the way each experiences God. That is why it is important to always use gender analysis, especially when dealing with questions of people's concerns and how such can be addressed. Gender analysis aims to achieve

equity, rather than equality. Gender equity takes into consideration the differences in women's and men's lives and recognizes that different approaches may be needed to produce outcomes that are equitable.

Gender analysis recognizes that:

- Women's and men's lives and therefore experiences, needs, issues, and priorities are different
- Women's lives are not all the same; the interests that women have in common may be determined as much by their social position or their ethnic identity as by the fact they are women
- Women's life experiences, needs, issues, and priorities are different for different ethnic groups
- Life experiences, needs, issues, and priorities vary for different groups of women (dependent on age, ethnicity, disability, income levels, employment status, marital status, sexual orientation, and whether they have dependants)
- Different strategies may be necessary to achieve equitable outcomes for women and men and different groups of women

Concerns as we move forward:

For the sake of policy development and service delivery, there is a need to examine the differences in women's and men's lives,

including those which lead to social, religious, and economic inequity for women. Research and practice have shown that there are still many women who die during child birth because they have been denied their sexual and reproductive health and rights. In the context of HIV and AIDS, the burden of caregiving, in most cases, exclusively rests on the shoulders of women. Relating this to the realities of the economic inequalities, as the second concern, most of these women are at the bottom of the economic pyramid, often living in extreme poverty and unable to afford health services.

Since 2007, World Council of Churches' (WCC) Agape² annual women's hearings on Poverty, Wealth, and Ecology have affirmed that most women do not have possibilities of creating wealth because of certain gender stereotyping that confines them to positions of easy exploitation. For example, patriarchal realities sometimes foreshadow women turning over financial resources to their male relations: husband/boyfriend, father, brothers, or uncles.

Inexplicably, most of this patriarchal hegemony is rooted in a biased interpretation of existing religious teachings. For example, some churches still use biblical texts that subjugate women to roles of submission and subservience to their heterosexual partners (Galatians 5:22).

Methodologies for moving forward:

- **Challenge existing social, economic and religious systems that encourage gender inequity.**
 - **Use gender analysis to interrogate** certain social, religious and economic beliefs and practices that disadvantage women.
 - **Create a safe space for girls and women** to be holistically empowered through awareness-raising, education in wealth creation, and sexual and reproductive health and wholeness. These will help girls and women to be able to make informed choices about when and with whom to be married and when to be involved in motherhood. They will also be protected from maternal deaths and sexual exploitation.
- **Read sacred scriptures with gender justice lenses using hermeneutics of suspicion.**
 - Since most of the inequalities suffered by women are directly connected to men, there is urgent need to **develop gender awareness training from both female and male perspectives** so as to address both women and men in order to maximize the anticipated positive change for women. World Council of Churches (WCC) and World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) initiatives aimed at involving men in the process of “men as partners: promoting positive masculinities” should be encouraged through collaboration and networking.



PERSPECTIVE:

A WOMAN OF FAITH DEFINED BY DIVERSITY



About the author: Dr. Azza M. Karam³ is the Senior Policy Research Advisor of the United Nations Development Program and Coordinator for the UN Arab Human Development Report. She has previously worked at Religions for Peace as the Director of the Women’s Desk, and has wide experience with religious women and men from around the world.

“Please, please don’t say anything negative or critical about Islam. It is your faith!” Such were the words of my late mother, with whom my relationship was never the easiest, as I decided to embark upon the journey of my doctoral studies of the tensions in my part of the world – the Middle East – between religion, governance and women’s rights. These three issues were structuring the dynamics of our lives through local and international politics, social issues, and even economics. Whether it was our micro family or within the entire region, religion, in this case Islam, was it. Having worked on and with nongovernmental organizations dealing with the extremely tricky subject of human rights for several years, I felt it was inevitable that at one stage I had to critically examine why it was that religious arguments seemed to be the ones that all protagonists — whether

those governing or those in opposition — were bandying about, and why it was that women were so symbolic a terrain of contention between all of these players who were by and large males.

To my mother's plea (more like a command) I would in the beginning roll my eyes in mock anguish, "Really mother, why ever would that be the issue in the first place," I would retort. After several years and further study, it became clearer to me that it is not about faith at all. It is about a group of men — politicians, religious leaders, even notable NGO activists — dancing around with religion as nothing more than a tool. And it is a macabre ritual ultimately defaming our faith. Who says it belongs to them anyway? Is God not mine too?!⁵

In the end my mother's warnings informed me more than any argument, books or even life experiences could or did. She was right of course, in her own way, because none of what was going on in the domain of politics or development is really about faith itself; instead, it concerns the fundamentals of religious politics.

I realized that some academics, particularly Western ones dealing with the Middle East, were far more comfortable lumping people and ways of thinking into certain simplistic categories, such as

"fundamentalism" (e.g., "Islamic fundamentalism" as part of religious fundamentalism). Some of my activist colleagues, on the other hand, were equally attracted by this simple process of categorization — or naming — which made "the enemy" easier to label and distinguish. The resulting thought process goes thus: religious fundamentalism is anti-democratic

and anti-women → religious fundamentalists are enemies of democracy and women's rights → anyone arguing about/for religion is against democracy and women's rights. So the solution is to not engage with religion, at all. Such

people, as "nondemocrats," cannot be engaged in the struggle for democracy. The solution to all the world's ills was: if you must have religion, then keep it personal.

Something inside me revolted against both logic and rhetoric. I believe that politics is part of everyday life. Who says that the higher price of a loaf of bread, determined because global markets were allowed by legislators/policy mak-

And it is a macabre ritual ultimately defaming our faith. Who says it belongs to them anyway? Is God not mine too?



ers to become greedy without any limits, is not a political issue? And when it came to faith, why is that “just” personal? By rendering faith nonpolitical, I was also allowing those who spoke in the name of religion to be the sole spokespersons for the entire faith. For how could I challenge what I believe my faith means to me in my life, if I was to be silent? In addition, those who speak in the name of religion do not do so “personally,”; they create entire agendas of governance, economics, culture and social interaction based on their understanding of what is religious. Millions are swayed by these agendas: indeed, millions vote on the basis of such “religious agendas.” Surely that voting is an act of democracy, so how can I afford not to engage? Do I become a nondemocrat and exclude these

millions and what sways them, in the name of fighting for democracy?

To detractors, my response is usually, if you believe in God, you must also believe that God alone is the judge of each and all of us. And I go back to my own religion here, Islam, to argue that surely, to believe is also to appreciate the verse in the Holy Qur’an that indicates that God created us in all of our diversity, not that we should sit in judgment of each other, but that we should know one another – i.e., know oneself. Again, I think, surely to be a Muslim is to also read and learn that the term “Muslim” is used in the Holy Qur’an to reference people who existed even before the advent of Islam as we know it today; indeed, it is used to refer to

Religious feminism is not merely a concept, but a reality born of the joint struggles of women of faith for their rights — with their faith as part of the armor.

Abraham, consecutive prophets, and believers.

At best, our faith is about tremendous inclusiveness of and humility towards each other. At worst, it should make us realize that nothing is so clear cut for our judgment, but everything bespeaks an ambiguity that in itself is a miracle of our creation and existence. To me, to have faith is to believe that human avarice, cruelty, judgmentalism, exclusion, and pain encountered in different parts of the world are not the norm. Indeed, to believe in God is to realize that there is a countervailing force which also provides the selfsame humans with empathy, kindness, and the most healing of all powers, love. To me, to be a Muslim is to realize that diversity (within and outside of us) is part of the wonder of being. I could not be all that I am without my faith. This continues to be demonstrated to me in my life through my father and through another remarkable woman who had herself encountered, in her own society, many forms of exclusion and discrimination. This is Mia Berden, my Dutch Christian mentor. Literally and figuratively, they have held my hands through rough times and show me how it is that faith is the art of love, the bearer of courage, and the means of survival through connectedness with

other people of faith.

I came to the United States in the winter of 2000 specifically to work with multiple communities of faith. I believe it was God's guidance that enabled

me to come to a country which I have held in such fascination for many, many years, and one which, ironically, despite finding its foreign policy at times confusing, I was nevertheless deeply attracted to. Why? Because it represents precisely the diversity that I find so "Islamic." After living in the US nearly the same amount of years as I have lived in several other Western European countries, I am not finding my multiple identities problematic. Nor indeed am I finding that being a woman of faith is leading to painful processes of othering. I believe that being a society built on diversity, the capacity for acceptance (or at least for a "live and let live" attitude) for people of faith and of multiple identities is not only a potential but a reality in the US.

Through studying many works of women of faith representing different religious traditions⁶ and working with communities of faith, several realities became apparent to me. Not only are women of faith the bulwark of faith-based services — forming, in some instances, over

90% of basic service providers in religious communities⁷ — but whether Traditional African or Chinese, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, or Baha'i, these women of faith see a huge difference between the spirit of their faith and the practices done in the name of their religion. Many of these women, through their remarkable intellectual endeavors and activism in both public and private domains, seek to reclaim their religious heritage and reinterpret the understandings of religion such that the faith becomes central to practice, rather than the current paradigm, where the religious institution is the focus of the practice and its sole interpreter. Part of the significance of this work is the affirmation of the fact that far from being solely a tool of women's oppression, religion is a fundamental aspect of the struggle for human emancipation, and with it, for women's rights. There is no way that this process of reclaiming the religious can take place by ignoring religion and castigating or alienating those who would speak in its name, or indeed, assuming that only the religious institutions represent the "religious."

My life in the Middle East taught me that to be a believer in human rights, in democracy, and in feminism (which encompasses both and much else), I had to reclaim the domain of the

religious as part of my struggle to understand myself and my society — an understanding that no politician, caught in the web of fighting for political power, in the midst of conflicting ideals, would be able to explain. My life in the West thus far has taught me that I must reclaim faith to appreciate the diversity I am in the midst of, as part of the wonder of my own religious tradition — which includes the wonders of any religious faith — a wonder that no religious clergy, experienced in fighting for a specific domain of power in a specific context at a certain moment of time, would be able to articulate. Both experiences have also brought me to the realization that one can be religious and a feminist at the same time. Religious feminism is not merely a concept, but a reality born of the joint struggles of women of faith for their rights — with their faith as part of the armor.

Faith is like life, it has its ambiguities and its certainties, and depending on where one stands, one sees the specific dimensions one wishes to acknowledge. As with life, faith will continue to baffle and illuminate, thwart and enable, mystify and empower. But like life, it is unavoidable ... and necessary.

PERSPECTIVE:

FROM INDIA: DECONSTRUCTING POWER AND GENDER, SEEKING EQUILIBRIUM



About the author: Shanthi Mathai is currently a General Committee Member, Asian Church Women's Conference (2006-2010), and has worked with and studied women's organizations. She works extensively with women, children, and faith communities in her native India.

Gender inequality and gender-based violence are realities around the world. Historically, a variety of socio-political and cultural factors contributed to this inequality, but the core factor – gender relations – that works behind all of these formulations and outcomes has an ideological imperative. While this is evident even in the global North where women are still excluded and unrepresented in the ministry and administrative settings of the Church, the situation in the global South is even more pathetic.

How do sex and the dictated gender roles contribute to this state of affairs? What is the role of theology? What is the scope of a redemptive interpretation from a genuine and truly theological gender perspective?

WHAT IS GENDER?

“Gender refers to the socio-cultural definition of man and woman; the way societies distinguish men and women and assign them social roles.”⁸

It is the everyday experience of expected masculine and feminine roles in a particular culture. Sex is biological, but gender is acquired or perceived through thought and behavioral patterns during the socialization process. Hence gender roles, gender relations and gender differences are culturally and socially constructed. For example, the household works of cooking, cleaning, and child rearing are considered to be women’s work; the roles of decision-making, breadwinning, involvement in politics, etc., are considered to be man’s work. In the same way, humility, kindness, patience, and obedience are thought and taught as feminine qualities; strength, dominance, anger, and leadership are thought of and taught as masculine.

POWER RELATIONS AND GENDER

Power is embodied in man-woman relationship. Male members of the society enjoy a historical experience of superiority and power, while female populations encounter a historically bitter experience of subordination, powerlessness, and violence against them. From childhood, boys and girls are tainted with superior/inferior complexes respectively as well

as associated power and pride in boys and guilt and shame in girls. To maintain the status quo of the subordination of women, the structures of oppression work through the systems and institutions in society— family, educational, political, religious, law – to require that women conform to their traditional gender roles. The perceived gender roles and identities shape the vision and action in all spheres of life.

Men as heads of households, husbands, and fathers, and as religious-political-social leaders, gain the power to control woman’s body, her psychology, wealth and property, and space of existence. With their patriarchal structure and gender-biased reflections and interpretation of Scriptures, religions play a vital role in the process of maintaining and transmitting this gender imbalance.

TRADITIONAL THEOLOGY AND GENDER

Culture, tradition, and religion work hand-in-hand in constructing the molds of gender roles. For centuries, the Scripture has been interpreted with a patriarchal perspective that subordinated and alienated women. Scripture has been used to enforce institutionalized discrimination against women. The ideological bias against women silenced the voice of women in Church and religious organizations and subsequently sidelined them from important and visible roles. The roles

of dignity and respect were reserved for men. The implications of this bias are explicit in the power relations in families and other social institutions.

The “God-experience” of people has a gender dimension created out of the perceived patriarchal ideologies and social constructions. Some of the traditional theological interpretations that have deep-rooted impacts on the gender roles in Church include God as male — hence male as the norm⁹, male as superior to female, men as heads of households and heads and masters of wives, women as lesser humans than men, women as property of men with which they can do anything. Not to mention the purity-pollution laws associated with the body of women and their biological functions, which negate the importance and higher value of bringing life to this world. These and other traditional mainstream interpretations are intertwined in the faith and practices of the Church and the social life of the people.

BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Only a methodology that views relationships of domination as a gender construction that is not natural or God-given can challenge the theological interpretations that support the maintenance of the status quo. Hence this

question of women’s inequality should be read along with the existential questions and struggles of the poor, oppressed, and marginalized communities in the world.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF HERMENEUTICS FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE¹⁰

The concepts of wholeness and integrity in creation, life in its fullness, and abundant life promised by Jesus to all, serve as a framework. Theological interpretation must be based upon the following theological methodologies:

- Questioning the theological interpretations of stereotyped gender roles as God-given. They are man-made and can be changed.
- Bringing forth the power relations in Theological production and admitting that “subjectivity is part of the production of knowledge.” Both the selection/omission of stories and experiences, discussion/no discussion, names/no names, silence/cry, etc., are valuable for interpretation.
- Dealing with the relationship between theology, gender, and feminism.
- Inserting theology in a holistic, systematic, and ecological paradigm.
- Calling for the transformation of “talking theology” to “doing theology.”
- Calling for gender sensitivity and moving toward the use of inclusive theological language.

DECONSTRUCTION AND RECONSTRUCTION¹¹

In addition to doing theology in such a way,

transformation of oppressive structures with which we live and breathe will only be accomplished through:

1. Deconstruction is the critical evaluation of the anti-women bias of mainstream theology where we unlearn the values and attitudes of inequality and then seek transformation of unjust and oppressive practices.
2. Reconstruction is the reformulation of theological concepts, attributes, and symbols (i.e., instead of the concept of a male God, we begin to imagine a God concept beyond gender with masculine and feminine qualities). Reconstruction helps to develop a right and responsible relationship with God and with ourselves, among men and women and among peoples as well as with earth and creation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the inferior and subordinate social status of women in society is culturally and socially determined. The systematic creation of oppressive structures that function through all social institutions, including Church, and the unequal power relations between men and women, deny women their right to equal opportunities, both socio-economic and political. They deny the healthy participation of men and women together in worshipping God and in the ministry and administration of the Church.

Addressing theology with a gender perspective helps discern and denounce the oppressive structures. Biblical hermeneutics with a gender perspective provides us with a rationale for speaking about gender equality that affirms a holistic, systematic, and ecological paradigm and provides alternative interpretations that help in the processes of deconstruction and reconstruction – in the reformulation of theological concepts and symbols.

PERSPECTIVE:

FROM THE UNITED STATES: IS THEOLOGY RELEVANT?



About the author: A citizen of the United States of America, Christine Housel is the Global Project Manager of the World Student Christian Federation in Switzerland.

I will answer: "Why theology which emphasizes women's equality is absolutely essential to real progress in the status of women around the world."

It seems to me that there is a question implicit within our question that we must address to answer it meaningfully.

It is the question of theology altogether. To many in this day and age, theology does not seem relevant to our real, daily lives. An online definition says theology is *"the rational and systematic study of religion and its influences and of the nature of religious truth a particular system or school of religious beliefs and teachings."*¹² Even this definition creates a feeling of distance. Theology can easily seem like something abstract and unrelated to us at best, or like a set of systems and beliefs that restrict and oppress at worst.

Does theology, in fact, have some relevance to my real life and concerns, and help move them forward?

Only when we see that it actually does will the original question itself matter to us—the question as to why it is important to do something historically different in theology in a consistent, intentional way, that is, to ensure that our theology does not diminish but rather empowers women.

The World Student Christian Federation, where I work, has a 114-year history of grappling with the political, economic, and social issues of our day within a theological framework. A conviction that God is real and seeks to partner with us in transforming injustice into just peace and fear into love motivates the students and alumni of the Federation. Therefore, theology is at the core of the spiral of analysis, action, and praxis for these leaders around the world. How do we develop our prayer and our reflection on God in such a way as to motivate us to be continually transformed as individuals and as communities be a prophetic witness in church and society? *This* is theology.

I watched the film *The Women* the other day. It is a story told about and from the perspective of a group of women friends and has an all-woman cast. After watching it and then learning about the evolution of the film through the director's notes at the end, I was surprised that I hadn't even noticed the fact of its all-woman cast.

We are not used to hearing things and seeing things from women's perspectives. Men are not used to it, and women are not used to it. It took *The Women* over 10 years to get off the ground, partially because many people thought an all-female cast would not be successful with the public.

I have become aware in my journey as a woman in the church and in society how deep is the imbalance that favors male perspectives and experiences, and I have wrestled to know myself within these structures and then to be a full participant — in my distinctiveness as a woman. That I simply enjoyed the movie as a movie, only reflecting on the all-woman cast later, signified to me that I have made some progress.

We need intentional actions and vehicles, like this movie, to bring women and women's ways into public life and thought and to create a new situation of balance and equity; this balance will contribute to the lives of all, women and men. Theology should be at the forefront of this needed change because we believe in a God who created men and women, in equity.

I am reading a book called *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today*, by Charles Marsh, where he studies the way in

which faith and theology inspired the vision that motivated Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders in the United States — the theological vision of the “beloved community” of forgiveness, reconciliation, and love. I haven’t reached the end, but he discusses just the topic we are working on together here: why is theology essential to our work? We are faced with as profound a challenge today regarding the ongoing struggle for gender equity as the civil rights movement faced in the 1960s. We have evidence that theological grounding and theological tools may and in fact must reach, challenge, and influence the hearts of individuals around us and the corridors of power (from local village councils to consultations with parliamentarians and the highest seats of the United Nations).

Lamentably, much of Christian theology in the last 2,000 years has sidelined or diminished women. Augustine, a theologian from the 400s CE, had tremendous influence on church and society today as we know it. One short but telling quote from Augustine is, *“Women should not be enlightened or educated in any way. They should, in fact, be segregated as they are the cause of hideous and involuntary erections in holy men.”* It is humorous in a way, but really, this quote is tragic because it reflects a body of thought that has done lasting damage to women, to the

relationships between women and men, and to the gospel, including giving church structures and men in power justification for blaming and punishing women for their own struggles. We know that Augustine was a product of a time when the social subordination of women was taken for granted and that his limitation and error in this area do not deny the beauty of what he says on other topics. But compare Augustine to Jesus, who lived 400 years prior, also in a society whose social definitions limited women. Jesus challenged the assumptions of this context and raised the honor and status of women by the way he engaged them and the position he gave them. Mary and Martha were his close friends, along with their brother Lazarus, and Mary sat with him as a student disciple. Imagine what might have happened if the theologians of the early church, and theology since, had followed this trajectory! There are veins within theology that have affirmed and empowered women, but much of it has done damage instead of providing the radical vision of equality and partnership between women and men that is its calling.

For theology to empower women, women must see themselves reflected in the theology. For this to happen, women must be writers of theology, and women and men together must examine and critique theologies of the past for their errors and rethink old assumptions. And all of this must

be communicated in action to the world. (Here we must take a moment to acknowledge the many dedicated professional and lay women theologians, and the men in solidarity with them, who have moved us so far forward already.)

At the General Assembly of the World Student Christian Federation in August 2008, one of the clear messages that came through was that this generation of our students, from all around the world, again affirmed that they are motivated by the hope that God is at work in history. They have a desire to grapple with what this means for their lives and contexts by doing theological reflection alongside study

and analysis of social, cultural, and political processes so that they may collaborate with the Spirit to effect change. In addition, the WSCF has had a longstanding commitment to being proactive in supporting the development and inclusion of women at all levels of leadership and participation, and to encourage women and men to learn how to interact and work together in ways that reflect our commitment to gender equity. It is not always clear how to motivate people for this change, but it is clear

to our community that working with and from theological foundations is absolutely necessary for us to find the ways forward.

Ecumenical Women has come to the same conclusion. We are all grappling with just what our theology is and how it connects to our action.

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This process of learning is a central part of our work, along with the advocacy actions that we undertake. Our effectiveness in the one, I suspect, will somehow lead to greater effectiveness in the other. Just how to understand what this means is an unfolding process. At the same time, we have a common understanding

that our theology must continue to evolve and continue to be shaped in part by our experiences and context. Our theology must be developed in collaboration and community. The empowerment of women and gender equality are not tangential to this exercise and very definition, but core.

PERSPECTIVE:

FROM KENYA: A THEOLOGY THAT EMPOWERS WOMEN



About the author: Christine Mangale, from Kenya, is currently serving as an intern within the Lutheran Office for World Community. Her extensive work with youth of the Lutheran Communion in Central and Eastern Africa is invaluable to her understanding and motivates her mission.

Religion is a powerful and important aspect for Africans regardless of their form of worship. Across African languages, the title given to a clergyman is “teacher.” With such a title, people who spread the word of God are held in high esteem – second to that of King. Therefore, with such power, theologians can change and direct attitudes of people in the parish and beyond.

Armed with legitimacy and acceptance, bishops, pastors, and evangelists have a unique opportunity to help their parishes improve the lives of women and expose the critical role a woman plays in raising a village. Because women are mothers of all genders and in many cases remain the backbone of the family, they should be treated as equals in every aspect of life. The more an African woman is empowered, the more she can do for her children who, as a collective, are the future of every society.

Women need to be equipped with positive equality theology at an early age so that young women grow up feeling as worthy and equal as their male peers.

Spiritual leaders are highly respected, and their word is seldom questioned, while the statements of politicians are often disregarded.

Because religious leaders are generally humble and listen to their parish, the average common African person cherishes their guidance and wisdom. As a result, theology that emphasizes equality is imperative for African societies.

As Africa embraces the dictates of modern life, women still remain the most marginalized, often because laws in many countries do not put women on the same footing as men. In many countries women cannot inherit from their husbands, and in some a widow is not an independent person (for she is forced to become a wife of her dead husband's brother). In many villages, girls are denied education and are placed into arranged marriages to bear children for all their reproductive lives. Theology that resists these notions is essential for the well-being of the African woman.

While some churches have remained conservative in their own internal dealings and in which women are not ordained, there is still merit in prescribing theology that emphasizes the

equality of women to men.

Empowered with such a theology, clergymen from these sorts of churches would still preach the prescribed equality of men and women.

In its absence, the clergymen

remain ignorant of the value of bringing women to the same status as men.

Theology with an emphasis on gender equality can have a tremendous impact on violence against women – such a theology would empower the poor woman who even after farming all day to sustain her family lacks financial security and possibilities to overcome her abusive church husband, because of the cultural norms that prevent women from becoming financially independent.

The “selective” theology that has been and is still being planted in our children's minds every Sunday needs to be revised. Women need to be equipped with positive equality theology at an early age so that young women grow up feeling as worthy and equal as their male peers. The mantra that must be instilled is: “educating a girl is educating a nation, a nation that can overcome any barriers.”

PERSPECTIVE:

FROM PERU: A FEMINIST VISION OF SPIRIT, POLITICS, AND PARTNERSHIP



About the author: Mag. Luzmila Casilda Quezada Barreto is a pastor from the Wesleyan Pilgrim Church in Peru, and a founding member of the Kairos Process in Peru. She received her PhD in History and Theology from the School of Advanced Theological Studies (EST) in Brazil.

I will answer: "Why theology which emphasizes women's equality is absolutely essential to real progress in the status of women around the world."

Because our world needs a spiritual theology and policies of liberation which encourage the struggle for life and justice and inspire our passions, dreams, and utopia visions, while maintaining our commitment to seek inclusive societies that accept and value diversity..

Because this spirituality is based on a concept of ethics that are theological, ecological and interreligious, which rise from the daily struggles that we see, feel, hear and practice in favor of human dignity in image and semblance of God. We oppose all dehumanizing forces of violence and injustice to women in our countries.

Because God chooses to protect the rights and citizenship of those who are excluded. This is acknowledged by the faith based in the blood, sweat, and tears of those who live with the reality of oppression and exclusion.

Because this theological reflection is not just directed at women, but seeks to become an integral human theology, one that demystifies androcentric thought and patriarchy and prompts other ways to see, feel, create, explain, and think about the world and human relations, so that things are not exclusively classified as male, and so that we can start creating female and male identities in our society.

Because women were delegated to an inferior status, justifying male domination and creating an aftermath of pain and suffering. Churches and communities cannot be silenced any more and continue acting as accomplices. Religion cannot maintain a value system that oppresses women; instead, it must promote changes through struggles, liberation, and resistance. It is time to unmask patriarchal systems in educational institutions, churches, and society so that we can change religious and civil structures accordingly.

Because as women start to see themselves as political actors, carrying out civil and religious duties, defending our rights to access power in decision-making processes in social and religious spaces, and as we start to own our own bodies and sexuality, we will establish a society that provides justice and equity among all human beings. This citizenship involves elections, participation, and social, ethical and legal acknowledgment of our role in society.

Because this theological reflection is based on the notion of a plentiful Life, within the limits of our existence and human mortality. By nourishing our hopes, dreams and visions for human wholeness we transform our communities. Our whole life is a wonderful gift prompted by God's generosity.

Because it is time for all women and men, solidarity networks, churches and international organizations to join forces and form strategies that empower women. Feminism has provided us a new vision for society where we must establish partnerships so that human rights for women become universal.



PERSPECTIVE:

FROM KOREA: MY DAILY LIFE AS A THEOLOGIAN



About the author: Rev. Hea Sun Kim is the Director of Scranton Women's Leadership Center, in Seoul, Korea. She is employed with the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church.

Protestant Christianity has been in Korea for about 125 years. Korea has witnessed fast church growth in the last few decades, probably one of the fastest in the world. In Asia, next to the Philippines which is predominantly Catholic, Korea has the largest number of Christians – a little over 20% Protestants and a little over 10% Catholics among the entire population. In the early years of Christian mission, women readily and whole-heartedly welcomed the new Western religion. Without naming it theology, women theologized the gospel message as a liberating message that freed them from the oppression of the cultural, social, and religious “norm” of their times. Women were the carriers of this liberating gospel to all corners of the country. They made up the majority of Christian converts, and missionaries focused on empowering women through education and leadership training.

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During the Japanese occupation of Korea, again, theology was about liberation.

Any message that had to do with liberation and justice was the living message that made the church powerful – powerful enough for the Japanese authorities to fear the church, which led to severe persecution of Christians. The persecution of the Christians continued to the Korean War, during which time the Communists became the oppressors of Christians. Korean Christians knew how to theologize the biblical text to resist the oppressive and unjust powers.

For people seeking justice and liberation, theology is not an academic discipline. Theology is not a study. Theologizing is what people do daily, living out their faith in all circumstances. Oppressed people know clearly who God is for them. God is the only source of their power in order that they may live. Otherwise, there is no need for a God.

Today, with vast church growth in Korea, women are in a different place. Women still occupy the majority of church membership, but now there are the rich women and the poor women, the powerful women and the powerless women.

In spite of this division of economic class, most women share the common experience of “women’s place” in the church dominated by male leadership.

The status of women in the church is clear when one looks at the statistics of the church. In one major denomination in Korea, women pastors comprise 5.4%; women lay elders are 8.4%; and women delegates to the general assembly are 4.5%. The entire membership of women is around 60%. The majority of lay women do not favor women’s pastoral leadership in the church. This is not an issue that can be solved with personal dialogue or even with legislative change.

“Women do not qualify to be leaders in the church,”

“Women are heirs of Eve, the tempter,”

“Women cannot stand at the pulpit,”

“Women should be submissive to church authority.”

These statements are all too common within the church. So sometimes the women have become their own enemies. Many women believe what they are taught by the church hierarchy, but there are also powerful resistance movements among women who challenge the oppressive nature of the church structure.



What is the most powerful tool for those that are committed to bringing about change for justice and fairness in the church structure? It is theology. It's the best tool women can use to educate themselves and others: Bible studies taught from women's perspective; reinterpreting what the gospel says about women, about church hierarchy, about power, and about resistance; knowing which text to use from the Bible for the message of liberation and justice; knowing who God is for them ... these are all works of theology.

All persons of faith are one's own theologian. The Gospel message is to free us from all forms of oppression, internal and external. If we realize that theologizing is not an option for faith, and that we actually are theologizing all the time, we will be empowered to choose theologies that free us. Women need to learn the methods of theologizing, for it is the most powerful tool for one's own empowerment and for the transformation of the world.

¹ Susan Frank Parsons, *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). 2.

² *African Women's Hearing on Poverty, Wealth and Ecology* (Dar es Salaam: World Council of Churches, 2007). <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/poverty-wealth-and-ecology/neoliberal-paradigm/african-womens-statement-on-poverty-wealth-and-ecology>

³ The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect any institution, organization, board, or staff members.

⁴ I see an important distinction to be made between religion (in Arabic, my language and the one I communicated with my mother in, it is *din*) and faith (in Arabic *iman*). When referring to religion, I am including institutionalized religion in all its forms (whether state ministries, religious bodies, religious schools, etc.) in addition to the clergy and other social and political actors who speak in its name.

⁵ See for instance Azza Karam (Editor), *A Woman's Place: Religious Women as Public Actors* (New York: World Conference of Religions for Peace, 2000); and Isabel Apawo Phiri et. al. (editors), *Her-Stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Cluster Publications, 2002).

⁶ This figure is based on my own research after several years of culling information from various religious organizations around the world and actual field observations from numerous communities in the United States, South and South East Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

⁷ Kamla Bhasin, *Understanding Gender* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2000). 1.

⁸ Ana Maria Tepedino, *Gender and New (Re-newed) Images of the Divine in Global Voices for Gender Justice* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001). 85-90.

⁹ Silvia Regina de Lima Silva, *Latin American Feminist Theology and Gender Theories in Global Voices for Gender Justice* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001). 67-70.

¹⁰ Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology, *Introduction to Asian Feminist Theologies* (Malaysia: Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology, 2005). 31.

¹¹ "Theology," *WordNet: A lexical database for English, Princeton University*. Accessed September 18, 2015. <http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=theology&sub=Search+WordNet&o2=&o0=1&o8=1&o1=1&o7=&o5=&o9=&o6=&o3=&o4=&h=>