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OUR VOICES

ems women's network



ENGLISH

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS – INSIGHTS FROM ASIA AND AFRICA



Evangelical Mission in Solidarity

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Dear women, dear sisters of the international women's network,

In March, we celebrated World Day of Prayer prepared by our sisters in Cuba with the title "Whoever receives one such child, receives me".

This day was celebrated in all EMS churches around the globe. Against the background of their historical burden the Cuban women teach us: survival of church and society depends on generations co-operating well.


In German speaking regions, we hear the encouraging Bible verse for 2016: "As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you." You will find a meditation on this verse on page 13 by Dr. Kerstin Neumann, the new deputy EMS general secretary and head of mission and partnership department since summer 2015.

Mothers – daughters – families. In this issue of OUR VOICES mothers from Ghana, Uganda, Japan, Indonesia give insights into their lives. Their personal struggles for survival reflect the economic shortages and political turbulences in their societies. How much strength and resilience these women and mothers must have!

How can motherly commitment be applied beyond raising one's own family? In a conversation with Dorothea Schweizer, we read about the Diakonia Sisterhood in South Korea, which, during the time of the military dictatorship, originated from a narrow Confuzian-style family approach. Eight young women jointly developed their discipleship as "an existence in the presence of God and living with the needy." For more than three decades now they "have given comfort like a mother" and introduced and established new Christian community structures.

In the NEWS you read about activities and concerns in the Church of South India, the National Evangelical Church in Beirut, the Batak Church in Indonesia and in the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria.

With cordial greetings from Stuttgart


Gabriele Mayer, PhD
EMS Gender Desk
International EMS Women's Network
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Mothers and Daughters in Ghana - New Challenges for Daughters

by Rebecca F.A. Abladey, pastor and EMS liaison woman

"Daughters have to rethink how to take care of their mothers. A lot has changed since our mothers were young and cared for their children".

This is one of her results Rebecca Abladey found when she interviewed mothers and daughters in the Accra New Town congregation, Presbyterian Church of Ghana.

Rebecca Abladey reports:

"My questionnaire revealed four different types of mother-daughter-relationship:

- daughters, whose mothers are still alive and close to them,
- women, who keep some kind of distance from their mothers or daughters.
- daughters, whose mothers were deceased and, finally,
- mothers who have lost their daughters.

Working with the questionnaire has given me much exposure about the reality of many women.

Daughters who want to offer care to their loving mothers are facing new challenges their mothers did not have to deal with. These daughters are working in institutions as secretaries, office attendants, bankers, nurses, teachers, and traders. Their time and energy must be divided between their job and their family responsibilities."

At the beginning of the interview, each daughter exclaimed her gratefulness for her mother in words like "Thank God for my mother. My life has been touched by her character, by her Godliness, her discipline and other values."

One daughter acknowledges: "the great impact my mother has on me. The greatest strength I have today derives from the nurturing ability of my mother."

All daughters experience the current situation as a real challenge: "Being employed as office worker, the time constraint has re-ordered our schedules and our availability at home has changed. Even though we feel the tension and responsibility to give back before they are called to eternity".

The situation in Ghana has changed during the last decades in various directions:

- The political, economic and educational influence has a great demand on women to become highly educated, and to move away from the former concept that "women are for the kitchen and only to be married."
- Today, women have the right to be part of politics and policy making and implementing of plans. From a Christian perspective that will enhance their gifts and reflecting the image of God in them.
- In fact, most women have admitted that there is a change between the generations "because our mothers had the time to nurture us but we are in business almost all the time. So our mothers are taking care of our children while we go out and work. They remained housewives and all attention is given to us".



Mothers, daughters, families who participated in the interviews in Accra.

Mothers support their daughters...

"We want the young girls to be educated to the highest level so that they can be women of substance and not school dropt outs."

"Daughters are blessings who continue from where their mothers left therefore when they fail all mothers have failed"

"I assisted my mother in her trade to sponsor my brothers to go to school, but they could not teach me enough how to read nor write hence I sponsored my daughters to go to school and now I can also travel abroad to visit them and their children".

Mutual agreements...

Some mothers are left at home until the daughters return from work. The only time they spend together are the weekends when they attend functions, church, marriage ceremonies, funerals and other social events. Some mothers keep the homes and perform other errands in order to be active. "Our mothers prefer cooking on their own some of the delicacies and leaving some of us to enjoy".

Other daughters have their mothers staying with older daughters of the same mother. For them it is occasional visit, periodic provisions and other commitments. This has been the family's agreement.


Dealing with experiences of loss...

Rebecca F.A. Abladey recalls: "I also met mothers who have lost their daughters.

These women stay on their own with other children who are male and younger ones. Some are caring for the children of their deceased daughters while the fathers of those children offer their support.

Other mothers are lonely for they had no sons either. These mothers without their daughters are coping with the situation but they miss their daughter very much.

There were others who have no daughters. Their daughters-in-law give them the very care they wished to have. These daughters-in-law have accepted the mothers of their husband as their own, the relationship is cordial, comparing to Ruth and Naomi in the Bible.

The daughters, whose mothers were deceased, expressed that their mothers were hardworking, loving and very caring to them as well as to people who came their way." 

Summarizing her findings:

Rebecca F.A. Abladey concluded that "daughters are willing to give back as much love and care to their mothers, but at the same time feel the demands of a different employment situation. Mothers wished their daughters to achieve a higher level of education in order to be successful and be prominent in society and they accept less support by their daughters."

P.S.: The question of elderly people living on their own in remote villages is also getting an urgent problem in Ghana.



Photos: private

Gunda Stegen, former ecumenical co-worker with mission 21, works in Uganda today and sent us the two following life reports:

Helen wanted to be a nun and was forced to become a soldier and a mother

"Today I am a single mother with one daughter. For security I keep my name secret, but I am an Ugandan woman and 37 years old. I would like to share with you the most difficult time in my life experience. There are friends and colleagues who had the same misfortune in their life.

Once my dream was to become a nun, a sister in a catholic denomination. So after my Primary Education 7th grade, my father took me to Sacred Heart, one of the mission schools in our home town.

During that time there was insecurity in the Northern Region of Uganda; a rebel group called "LRA", Lord Resistance Army of Joseph Kony, tortured the people leaving thousands dead. One day, they ambushed our school, adapting about 50 students and I was among them. By then, I was 16 years old.

Only 35 students reached the destination. Because if you were tired and could not walk any longer, the rebel guard would ask you: "Are you tired?" If you replied with "Yes.", then he would ask you a second time: "Do you need some rest?" and of course innocently one would reply with "Yes" and they shot immediately.

The walking speed was too high, especially with baggage of 30-50 kg weight.

During day time we walked in the bush and at night we followed the road. It took us four days to reach their camp. On our way many innocent people were killed.

On our arrival, I was put to work in the house of one of the commanders to serve in the family for two years. During

that time we also went for serious military training. There were more children than adults. They forced mostly school children to become soldiers.

At the camp, there was a lot of work like changing grass on our small 'manyatas' (small huts) because the top was covered always with ever green for security purposes. All this was done under tight security supervision - trying to escape meant to be arrested and being killed. What I have learnt is that young soldiers are even tougher than the older ones because they have no mercy.

I was forced to marry one of the lieutenants and life continued somehow. After two years, I was pregnant. Then we were taken again to ambush a trading center. This time we were overpowered and most of our soldiers were killed. Even so-called 'my husband' was killed in front of me.

That was our chance, three of us ran away: two former school mates who had already babies and I in pregnant condition. We stayed in a National Park for two days. At night we slept on the trees fearing wild animals.

The 3rd day we came across the main road and as we followed this road, a white man stopped his car, took mercy on us, introduced himself as a priest, took us to the mission. He later connected us to Kampala, the capital so that each one of us could get back home.

My daughter nowadays is asking me about her father, but I feel not to tell her about my past. I did not love him. Only my daughter should have a right to know the patrilineal side of her existence." ☹



Margret is a social worker in Jinja, Uganda and works with a small Non-Governmental Organization. She asked a commercial sex worker about her life.

Trying to survive economically as a single mother

The organization works with street children. So, once in three months, we organize regular night walks to the places where children and young people are. This helps us to register new faces, young homeless newcomers. Most of these children are not seen during the day; they spend in the hideout for fear of police officers. But at night they come out for gambling. Many girls and young women sell their bodies.

I talked to a young woman of 26 years, mother of two. I asked her why she was doing this kind of business.

She told me:
 "I conceived my first born at the age of 16 years, when I was still enrolled in school.

My mother got so disappointed and pushed me to marry the boy. When I had two children with him, my husband neglected his family and left me in the one room house.

I was only a housewife and I had to pay the house rent, to feed the children, to raise them by myself. I feared to go back to my mother's home with two grandchildren, she was still angry with me.

One of my neighbours had four girls, they slept all in one room; the mother regularly left at 5p.m. and came back early in the morning. The girls were so nice looking and beautifully dressed. I wondered what kind of job she was doing.

At that time I was actually in a situation I would have done any kind of work. I thought about factory work, a bar or a waitress job.


My neighbour introduced me to "Mama Withney". Mama said she would take me.

So they borrowed for me a nice dress explaining that the Code of Conduct was to attract the customers. The first day I was introduced to a man, a transvestite and was paid about 15 Dollars.

I felt lucky! It would be easy to make money that way. In short, things have changed now:
 On average my service costs 3000 UGX (app. 15\$) for 30 min and it can take place anywhere.
 On average, in a safe room is rent plus 5000 UGX (app. 0,90\$).
 A played romance on top with only one customer is a 10,000 UGX (app. 3\$)

The price for "abnormal" sex remains the same. Unprotected sex in a nice environment can include all for 100,000-150,000 UGX (app. 30-45\$).

In the first week, I made a lot of money because I was a new face and customers "rushed into me". After five years of experience I can dress nicely and be smart, too.

Most important: Today my children are at a boarding school. They will have a better life and hopefully will care for their old mother." 



Strong Voices from Myanmar

Pioneer women in terms of Christian education

Ngo Mai and Mai Ki share from their lives: the mother belonging to the first generation of Christians and her youngest daughter, becoming the first woman ordained in the Mara Evangelical Church.

"I am Mai Ki, the youngest daughter of Mrs. Ngo Mai, a very devoted mother. My father Seko already died, both came from Sabawngpi village, Matupi township, Chin State, Myanmar.

At that time, the Mara people did not know how to read and write, and hymn books were not yet available as the Church was just new born through our Missionaries.

Therefore our local church sent my father and his friend to memorize the Christian Hymns in India. During worship time back home they would recite the hymn and people followed to sing them.



Both our parents were farmers who shifted annually from one place to another place by cutting trees, burning them and cultivating rice and corn. Their lives depended totally upon the land, the climate, whose livelihood was easily destroyed by wild animals. They only could afford to send to school the eldest son and me out of six children.

My beloved mother's voice is still echoing in my ears. Through our daily family devotion we learnt:

"Do not let the sun rise nor set without God for life is fragile."

"If you have eyes, use your eyes for you and for the blind."

"If you have healthy hands and legs, use them for yourself and for the handicapped."

"Praise God and serve humans until you reach heaven".

"Every tree, every creature loves to feel and to hear that they are loved."

My mother was convinced: without literacy one can serve only little. Therefore all her children should receive education enabling to serve more to others.

With this voice and life of my mother, I started going to school at my native village. For classes 9-10 I had to walk

for four days (one way) to get to Matupi Town. For classes 11-12 I lived at Pakkoku College. It took me 17 days on foot for the 1st year's admission due to heavy rain and no regular transport service. And classes 13-14 I studied at Magway University of Myanmar.

For several years I suffered from sickness attacks. Then I was not able to talk and lost consciousness or was brought in very life threatening situations by those attacks. I only can describe it as attacked by "evil spirits". Some people assumed a kind of mental disorder and sent me to hospital. Through prayer of my mother and close friends, I felt supported and could recover from this crisis. Today I understand that time as "spiritual examination time".

Nevertheless, I could continue with my Bachelor of Divinity (BA) and even completed my Master of Theology (M.Th) by specializing in Old Testament at Gurukul Lutheran Theological College in Chennai, India. My BA thesis dealt with the "concept of Justice in the book of Amos: its implication for Mara community in Myanmar" and my M.Th thesis elaborated on 'Women in Exodus Event: Challenges for Mara Women in Myanmar'

I strongly believe that educating children in school can be a long term strategy for improving their life situation. Teachers can inculcate love, justice and equality in the life of their students who will be the leaders of tomorrow.

My personal motto is "to comfort people". For me, mother means comforter. I am convinced if all fathers crossed their hands a day, all development may halt a day but if all mothers crossed their hands a day, not only development is halted but also the world would cry from the missing comfort of mothers.

After graduation I accepted to become the secretary of Service & Development Department of Mara Evangelical Church and started various development programs in co-operation with the Church, the community and international partners:

In 2004, Centre of Maraland Education, now COME High School, in 2005, establishing the Mara Special Student Scholarship,

in 2006, the Rural Women Empowerment Project,
in 2007, Shalom for Differently Able Friends and Old Aged people,
in 2008, focus on Sustainable Development,
in 2009, the Maraland Skill Training Centre and the Ratu Animal Bank.

The Mara community lies in a very remote area which needed road and bridge construction, food security, water supply and relief. There was no road, no electricity, no telephone, no healthcare, no doctor, no town, no bank to save or draw and totally away from modern facilities. Main reason was the lacking of a bridge. During the rainy season it was impossible to convey any news to the village on the other side of the river.

In all institutions and projects I am moving in a "learning role" before God and a facilitating role to my family, colleagues and community. Every day I conduct the daily devotion and family development committee meetings are organized monthly.

The main changes during 2003 – 2016 which I observe are:

There are more girl students than boy students while I myself was only one female out of 10 male students, now

two third of University students are girls. There is an increase of educated youth with clear vision and goal. There are theologically trained women, lay ordained preachers and evangelist, women leaders in village and local church level.

Infrastructural changes are the existence of roads, bridge, telephone, internet, Health center, motor bike and truck which our people did not believe to be available in Mara community in 2003.

The increase of drug free persons in the community, the Mara people have had a long tradition of smoking and beetle nut chewing to prevent mosquitoes in farming and to prevent toothache, but now it is increasingly despised.

My dream and goal for the future generation is that, as images of God, men and women will play in family, church and nation as the two wings of the same bird to accomplish God's purpose for human and creation. I pray that every woman will be proud for being a woman and every child must be welcome to be born as Mary and Joseph welcome Jesus, the Savior of the World.

My main challenges are a shortage of love, wisdom, capacity and facility from my side and poor cooperation of Church and State for rural community development. ☹



Photos: private

In 2006, Mai Ki (second from right) became the first ordained woman minister in Mara Evangelical Church. In 2003, Mai Ki married Rev. Si Khaw: In 2004 she gave birth to a son, following four daughters. In total she is mothering and pastoring her own five children and additional five nephews and niece in the same home. Two sister-in-laws support her.

The Diaconia-Sisterhood – an Alternative to Confuzian Tradition

Motherly commitment beyond raising one's own children

Rev. Dorothea Schweizer in a conversation with Gabriele Mayer

Photos: Dorothea Schweizer



Dorothea Schweizer with the three responsible sisters in the nursing home, s. imprint



Mother House of the Diaconia Sisterhood



Kimchi clay jugs with different types of sauces

In the small sitting room on the second floor of the Mother House of Deaconesses in Stuttgart, my eyes are immediately attracted by several fine works of art from Korea where Dorothea Schweizer lived and worked for twelve years. This was during the hot phase of military dictatorship of president Park Chung-Hee.

When in the 1970s young well-educated women were looking for forms of life other than the traditional women's role in Korean society, Dorothea Schweizer was part of it, right from the beginning. Family structures were rigid at that time of Confuzian tradition and girls were expected to be obedient to their father, later their husband and finally to their eldest son.

Women were of importance for family life, education of the children, and even with regard to money matters, but to follow a career or even have independent participation in public life in society and the church remained the sole right of men.

This group of young women had a strong spiritual mission; they wanted to play an active part as disciples of Jesus in the church and society, specifically as unmarried women. Together they wanted to develop a genuine Christian contribution. During this time, they met Professor Dr AHN Byung-Mu, head of the Theological Research Institute and a lecturer, especially at Hanshin Theological College.

Professor AHN was actively involved in the struggle for democracy and human rights during the time of the dictatorships. During his studies in Europe he learnt about models of Protestant sisterhoods and ecumenical communities and had brought back the idea of a Protestant sisterhood. Due to his activities against the dictatorship he had to reckon with imprisonment. Thus he authorized Dorothea Schweizer, his co-worker at the Institute, to accompany the young women during their regular meetings, to do research work and to forge international links. It was a lengthy process as the young women did not want to copy from the west but to find their own Korean style.

At the beginning there were eight young women with diverse backgrounds regarding education, profession and religion: they were theologians, a professional house keeper, nurses and a book keeper....

Some came from a liberal, others from a pious Christian background.

Especially at the beginning of her life together in the sisterhood Dorothea Schweizer had to learn to be very cautious with her proposals. It was an intensive learning process for her to accept that the women wished to keep their Korean identity. She feels perhaps like an obstetrician or midwife. Her role,

however, in a Korean context, corresponded more to an elder sister than a mother. She offered spiritual welfare to the sisters, kept her ears open for their woes and difficulties, she supported Professor AHN in his biblical-theological pastoral work and in developing rules and a constitution for the sisterhood.

She also wrote reports, thus being a language bridge between Korea and Germany. She also dealt with fundraising activities and established ties abroad. Professor AHN was especially aware of the importance of international contacts as support in the times of political oppression then. Thus the young sisterhood applied for membership in Kaiserswerther Verband and they got to know people and received new impulses from other communities such as the sisters in Grandchamp, the community Imshausen, Taizé or Christusbruderschaft.

After the three-year preparatory period with the group in Seoul, Dorothea Schweizer took regular trips by car to Mokpo, a seaport in the very South of Korea, 400 km from the metropolis.

And this was the reason for her travelling: For the young sisterhood it was a godsend when a lung specialist in Mokpo offered them the possibility of living and working on the campus of her hospital for pulmonary diseases. They worked as nurses, as theologians in the pastoral accompaniment of patients, in terminal care and offered a spiritual background for themselves, their patients and many guests from near and far. A structure was thus established for their community life in Mokpo. Nevertheless, they had to face big challenges with many ups and downs

because they had not had any role models and no time as novices during which they could have learned from older sisters.



Korean Bible in the chapel, a handwritten copy of the Holy Bible, a gift to the Sisterhood

For many years the sisterhood worked at two places: Mokpo and Cheonan. Until only a few months ago, they ran a retreat centre with a guesthouse offering courses in the field of education in Cheonan, one hour south of Seoul. Many church groups participated in the devotions and services and also availed themselves of the pastoral counselling offered by the sisterhood and invited the sisters to



After Sunday Service in the Chapel of the Motherhouse in Cheonan

assist in their own community seminars. Today the sisterhood looks back on almost 40 years of existence. During this time they have experienced many changes in their sisterhood, but especially in Korean society and the church.

Time and again, they have had to decide how to respond to new challenges. The joint search for suitable answers is characteristic of their inner attitude – no prioress determines the direction. This deep conviction of democratic cooperation has had a great impact on their decision making: only when all members agree to a certain direction, will this be followed. If not, they wait, pray, deliberate until a door opens for everybody. During the past 35 years they have remained true to their motto and guiding principle: “Being in God’s presence and living with the marginalized”.

Looking back Dorothea Schweizer is deeply impressed how many different tasks the small group of sisters have had to deal with:

First the lung clinic which was later taken over by the national health care system.

They also regularly visited elderly people and large families living in the slum areas of Mopko who scarcely had enough to live on let alone send their children to school. The sisters established a scholarship programme for these neglected children to give them a chance for a better future through education.

Then they were asked by the urban administration to care of the numerous neglected elderly people in a day-care centre in the city. The sisters succeeded in mobilizing voluntary co-workers from church congregations.

During this strenuous period they realized what their next big task would be: the establishment of a care centre for elderly people. The campus of the former hospital for pulmonary diseases seemed to be very suitable. In 2008 the care centre was inaugurated – a pilot project for the whole of South Korea. Today 60 elderly people in need of care are fully tended and nursed by 37 skilled personnel and co-workers...

Naturally, the question arises as to how such a community can continue. Time and again young women lived with them for a certain period of time, completed their novitiate, but in the end were not able to make a lifetime promise. In recent years the community has expanded and been rejuvenated by families who felt attracted by their kind of spirituality and their impact on society. In the meantime three families have been officially admitted and have taken on their own tasks in the surrounding villages which had been neglected for years. Ecological concerns which had always been important for the sisters from the very beginning are now being put into practice by these families in the villages.

Finally, I asked Dorothea Schweizer how she would describe her relationship with the sisterhood today now being back in Germany – does she feel like a kind of grandmother?

No, she would still see herself as a motherly elder sister. She has never lost contact although direct visits have become seldom. She regularly thinks of the sisters in prayer as she knows about their concerns. She receives visits whenever any of the sisters are in Germany and she goes to Korea herself on very special occasions. ☺



Sunday Service with residents in the nursing home

Meditation on the Bible Quote for the Year – Isaiah 66:13

**“As a mother comforts her child,
so I will comfort you”**

(according to NRSV)

by Kerstin Neumann

I love this year's Bible Quote, the feeling of protection it creates, yet giving space and encouraging to formulate our faith in much more holistic and ever new expressions.

Thinking of God as a comforter is soothing, particularly at the beginning of a new year we need courage and confidence. As we sense uncertainty and insecurity all around we must be strong to allow human fate to touch us and to raise our voices.

Imagining God as a mother is opening a whole world of ideas:

- We are invited again to reconsider gender roles of the Bible as well as ours today: Can't fathers comfort well enough? Are all mothers always good at it simply for being mothers?
- Let us have courage and bolster courage to attempt feminist interpretation of the scripture, thus gaining a much more integrated and full image of God.
- What a wonderful idea to perceive ourselves as God's children and to experience scope and options in this relationship to discover what might be hidden to the adult eye.



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These words of the prophet Isaiah, as we find them in the third part of the book, speak about salvation for God's people as they return from Babylonian captivity. Reaching Judah and Jerusalem they find the temple destroyed, they understand that their 'new' life will be determined by economic difficulties, political insecurity, and the destruction that surrounds them. However, the prophet speaks about a break-through, about future wellbeing and joy. Saying so he emphasizes the compassion of God's love for all who face sorrow, but wait humbly and full of hope.


Comparisons between then and now are available in plenty, particularly in the force of the situation, in the tremendous challenges we face today as the Israelites did then, in the uncertainty that determines our being. We are invited to accept this word of comfort.

However, God's closeness, concern, love, and compassion are surely not

meant as a quality of an exclusive one-to-one relationship. Most cultures don't perceive human beings as individual personalities. In Tamil villages I learnt that motherly care and sense of responsibility are transferred to the relationships within the village as a whole.

Motherly affection and care is not reduced to an exclusive mother-child relationship, but is rather a qualification of being human. In other words: compassion is an attitude that binds us to other beings with all our being, heart and mind. This attitude places us into a deep relationship with nature and calls us to accept others in sorrow as well as joy and to feel responsible.


Such compassionate love of God, comforting and encouraging, forms the context of the prophet's message. We read it in Isaiah, chapter 61:1,2 and we know it as the Nazareth Manifesto, Jesus' first sermon, in Luke 4:18,19 (NRSV):

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." 



Kerstin Neumann had lived and worked in South India for 20 years before becoming Head of Department Mission and Partnership in Stuttgart, Germany.

It was only in August 2015 that Kerstin Neumann moved back to her home country, Germany – before she had lived for 20 years in South India, where she had worked as a lecturer at the Tamilnadu Theological Seminary. She is married to Rev. Dr. J. David Rajendran. Their two daughters are Paula and Naomi.

Her experiences during her many years in India, where various religions exist side by side, was: "There are many people who are afraid of a dialogue with people of different confessions and religions because they fear that they might lose some of their own faith if they are confronted with other notions of God, other ethical concepts and other ways of life. But this is not true. On the contrary: People who are encouraged to rethink their own beliefs and to explain them in an understandable manner, will ultimately feel stronger in their faith, not weaker." 

Symbols and pictures of comfort

We had asked people: Which pictures or memories do you have with regard to comfort and feeling of security? We received the following responses:



"Life! Life going on from one generation to the next!"

...from Korea: a woodcut by LEE Chol-Soo

Lutz Drescher: "Life! Life going on from one generation to the next!" This is the title of this woodcut by the popular artist LEE Chol-Soo from South Korea. With this woodcut, the artist tries to illustrate the idea of "the never ending return of life" which plays an important role in Buddhism.

We see a tree growing strongly, striking new roots again and again – the power of life becomes tangible. In East Asia, it is not so important what achievements a person can present. The sense of life is fulfilled when life is forwarded. This work of art invites us to preserve life, to forward life, literally and figuratively. ☺

...from Lebanon: childhood memories

Wadia Badr: "The symbol that expresses my comfort during my childhood is the "Nativity Scene." During my childhood, I received so much love and care from my parents, my uncles and my aunts, that gave me comfort and stability. But what comforted me most was the tender treatment my mother showed me, and her sacrifice and unlimited patience with me and my brothers and sisters.

I was afraid to sleep by myself at night, but her stories near my bedside gave me much comfort and calm in the dark.

This childhood comfort I also received from my father, who was a strong man, but expressed his love in a motherly emotional way. That's why I chose the Nativity Scene as a symbol of parental love and care that comfort children." ☺

... from Ghana: a joyful embrace between mother and adult daughter. ☺

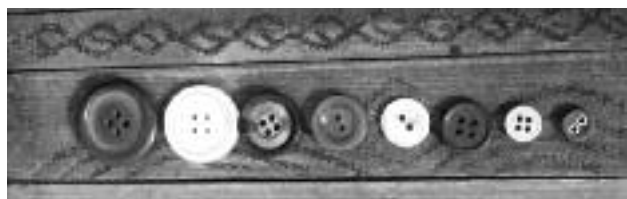


Rebecca A. Dowuona and her mother

...from Berlin:

an experience of four sisters, now between 35 and 45 years, when thinking of their elderly mother:

"Our mother always held everything together – like a row of buttons." ☺



YOU+ME Friends around the world



Education has high priority in the EMS. Education for young and old and all around the globe. From January 2016 on, EMS has started to develop an educational program for children. Anna Kallenberger and Annette Schumm will coordinate and maintain this project. For many years, both of them have worked in the field of Global Learning with children. Now they take on a fresh challenge.

What is the aim of the new educational program of EMS?

Annette Schumm: Children are our future. A lot of children are part of the worldwide network of churches of EMS. Most of them are already involved in their churches. We want to get in contact with those children, empower and connect them.

Anna Kallenberger: Solidarity is a part of our name and that says it all. The aims of Global Learning are the development of solidarity and empathy. Therefore, Global Learning fits perfectly into the activities of EMS.

Annette Schumm: And the international exchange between the children plays an important role!

How do the first months look like? Do you have any ideas yet?

Anna Kallenberger: In the first months we are looking at the status quo. Initially, we want to find out in which ways Global Learning takes place in the EMS member churches. I already have thousands of ideas in my mind and I am looking forward to putting them into action. In doing so, it is important for us to get all EMS members on board.

Annette Schumm: We want to surprise the children and all people who work with children with suitable child-orientated methods and work materials.

Who is the target group?

Anna Kallenberger: We aim to reach children in the primary school age, children in Sunday schools and preschool children.

Annette Schumm: Worldwide!

Anna Kallenberger: Nowadays, children at a young age have already come into contact with topics within Global Learning. In this context it is important for us that they meet each other on an equal playing field in an ecumenical surrounding.

Annette Schumm: Altogether we emphasize what connects us with each other: Our faith, our families, the school and games. Simply everything, of children's everyday life.

The interview was conducted by Elisa Heiligers, Junior Online Editor, Corporate Unit Communications.



An Indonesian mother on Sumatra – her daughter in Germany

Tiny Irawani, ecumenical co-worker, tells us about her mother in Indonesia and herself in Germany. Bahasa Indonesian is her mother tongue, but she wrote her observations in German and we translated into English:

„My mother's name is Hotmarni Boru Tobing. She is 63 years old. She is a widow. My father died long ago. She lives in Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia. My mother lives together with her sister and I support her financially. She does not receive a pension. Before we came to Germany, she lived with us on Sulawesi.

She cooks well, but she is not a professional cook. She often cooked for people who ordered meals, e.g. for a celebration or at Christmas. Thus, she could earn money to buy food for us.

When I was a child, I helped her with the cooking. Today she does not cook anymore because she is getting weaker. She will always be a role model for me.

There are many differences in our lives:
 She got married when she was 17, I was 28 at my wedding.
 She had no formal education and no job. I was able to study and I am a woman with a paid job.
 She has four children, I am mother of two.

My own dreams:

When I was a child, I dreamed of becoming a doctor one day, but my father had no money. People in Indonesia must pay a lot for education and studies. This is also our worry when we go back to Indonesia. Our children cannot go to university there if we have no money. They do not want to go back to Indonesia – they hope to go to university in Germany. When our contract expires, we have to look for another job to be able to stay in Germany till our children have finished school. Then they can stay here on their own and go to college or university.

My dream for the next generation in Indonesia:

Young people have free access to education or receive scholarships. Not having a good job, many elderly people in Indonesia have no retirement pay. So my dream for the next generation: Everybody should get a good education to find a well-paid job and thus earn sufficient money to pay for their retirement pension.“ ☺



Photos: private

Tiny with her mother in August 2015 during her visit to Indonesia



Grandmother Hotmarni Boru Tobing with her grandchildren on her birthday in September 2015

Mothers in Japan

Five years after the catastrophe mothers still struggle with nuclear radiation

Gabriele Mayer



The photographer Shuji Akagi followed traces of the catastrophe with his camera – before these vanished secretly and were made invisible step by step.

A photo is missing here:

We would have liked to print a photo of mothers and children drawing their pictures. Against the background of increasing media censorship the mothers wanted to avoid trouble and asked to stay incognito.

In November 2015, I was privileged to visit Tohoku Area, in particular a group of mothers in Fukushima.

In the premises of YWCA's "Caro Fukushima", a group of mothers meet on a regular basis with their children. Some time ago they had taken English lesson with Rev Sabine Kluger, now they met again to reconvene and to share their life concerns with us.

The meeting place, Caro Fukushima, is a small rented building of the YWCA of Japan. Walking the short distance from the main train station to Caro Fukushima, I was wondering how we could bridge the language barrier, cultural barrier and how those mothers might be willing to share their experiences and challenges to foreign visitors.

Since Sabine Kluger was familiar to them, it was much easier to visit with one another. Fortunately, the YWCA staff helped us to translate between Japanese and English.

It was raining and the children were not allowed to play outside. The women knew that during rain fall radiation was stronger and they are always alert avoiding any risk of exposing their children to increased radiation. It was already difficult and an ongoing burden to remain and continue living in this area. Soon I learnt how demanding their job was to mother children in a radioactive contaminated area. Although the threefold catastrophe occurred back in April 2011, the impact still can be felt.

PAINTING AS A DOOR OPENER FOR SHARING

A children's painting-book was like a door opener. We had some booklets with us, telling the biblical creation story in a nutshell – and inviting children (and adults) to start with some few hints and develop the whole picture according to one's own creativity and understanding. For about 15 minutes all of us were painting, drawing lines, pondering, whispering with one's neighbor and looking to the neighbor's art what she would portray. Then, everyone was invited to show one's picture and to explain in a few words what each of us wanted to express.

It was so amazing, touching, moving, to listen to each of the children and to each of the mothers, the YWCA staff and also the visitors.

A girl of eight painted her favorite mountain close to her home town. Two young people from her summer camp were standing on the top "making a promise for continuous friendship" on her mountain. She admires them very much – and they seem to symbolize her escape time from the contaminated area during the summer camp.

A boy of about eleven years presented the world as fighting everywhere and completely divided in two hostile groups.

A seven-years-old boy expressed his anxieties about Russia's entering the war in Syria and dropping bombs. He used strong red color all over his picture and we could feel his strong emotions.

FEELING THE HEAVY BURDEN

We were wondering whether the catastrophe brought changes within the people. One YWCA staff explained: "Every person suffers from severe emotional distress and the social atmosphere is very fragile. Society should be a place where children can smile. But the air is full of sadness."

Another staff observes: "Quite some people are stuck emotionally in the same place since the accident and many did not change at all."

One mother shared: she hopes that her children will leave Fukushima one day and go out and explore nature, capable of judging by themselves and not by the government what is possible for them. She dreams of one day in the future embracing grandchildren – that's what she fights for every day. For her, it is encouraging to meet friends who also look to the future and walk next to her step by step. She wishes so much not only to tackle huge problems caused by the three-fold disaster, but she longs for understanding the deeper meaning of it.

"Such an incredible earthquake happens only once in thousand years so it has to have a deeper meaning which we need to unearth." Poetic language helps her to uphold her hope: "Climb over the gate and enter the garden". She desires so much that all her tedious and daily struggle might not be in vain.

IN A NUTSHELL: MMM

What they need most: **M**eeting like-minded people, **M**oney in terms of financial support for prevention measures, and **M**ass Media that are willing to take the risk and tell a different story than the official censored story of the government.

MOTHERS LEFT ALONE

The mothers being asked whether their husbands support their concerns regarding the health threat due to radiation: Spontaneously, with one voice and unambiguous gestures, they exclaimed NO. Later we learnt that in this area there were twenty couples whose marriage broke apart due to opposing perspectives on taking protective measures for their kids.

One mother had drawn a hedgehog and explained: "People feel and keep isolated due to being disappointed again and again – and because they are not really being listened to."



Another woman added: "People are like 'harinezumi' = hedgehogs instead of holding hands." (see photo above)

"Accompaniment" is a source of encouragement; and inner healing can occur when they can meet people who listen, who are still interested in their life concerns even five years after the catastrophe, when they receive opportunities to get out of the contaminated area and to gather with nice people and feel their kindness. ☺

New focus in church work due to Boko Haram

The Women's Ministry of EYN, The Church of the Brethren in Nigeria, is facing the challenges

by Suzan Mark Zira, Letter sent in February 2016

My dear sisters in the Lord,

I am glad to hear from you. Indeed it is pleasant to know that there are people that care for you in such terrible times like this.

Yes, God has assigned me to lead the women ministry of EYN, Church of the Brethren in Nigeria. I am looking to Him for how to go about to affect the life of women in general.

We have unbelievable numbers of widows and orphans. Most of these widows are young and need to continue their studies to have better life opportunities, education is the only possible way to be empowered in all areas of life.

As such, we have come up with proposals and structural plans for their education as well as education of orphans. For years now, government schools have been closed. And the orphans are out of school because they cannot afford to pay school fees in private schools.

It is disheartening that some orphans are used as domestic slaves, while others are taken away from their relatives to another part of the country in the name of education. We cry for their return because we don't know what kind of teaching they are getting. So, we want to start an education centre where these orphans can receive training.

We also noted that women need to be empowered economically, socially and politically, so that their voices can be heard. We are working strongly towards that, and so we need your support and prayers. We request that whenever you have workshop trainings in relation to how we can face these challenges, please invite our office! We need to be empowered. For you cannot give what you don't have.

The two Women & Gender desks of mission 21 and EMS search for ways how they can respond best to Suzan Mark's request.

NEWS FROM EMS WOMEN'S NETWORK

INDONESIA

Agnes Thiolina Lumbantobing, Samosir:



In 2015, Agnes was participating in a course of nine months at Asian Rural Institute (ARI) in Japan. She was part of an international group of young people from Africa and Asia and she dealt with "organic agriculture", food security for rural communities and leadership as "service for others".

In her region, in the Batak community, women are generally expected to get married. Agnes tries to find other ways: she realizes her wish to do something for others as deaconess in church service.

"I am very happy that I can share with you some perspectives on practicing a caring attitude as a diaconal minister. My full name is Agnes Thiolina Lumbantobing. Back home I grew up with four brothers and one sister.

After my graduation from Diaconical School in 2011, I served in a community and cared for a so-called play-group for one year. For the next two years, my focus was on social activities in a congregation. That meant visiting sick people and attending to their needs, teaching children, supporting pregnant women that they could deliver their baby with the help of a midwife.

On a regular basis, we go back to the women after birth of their baby and see whether they need anything. I am very happy when I can help them. In case a baby dies and cannot survive, I also mourn and get very sad.

Therefore, supporting pregnant women and their children means also to take care of their health, in particular healthy food. In such situations health education and promotion of healthy food is an important part of my diaconal tasks.

We call our community of unmarried Diaconical ministers IKADIWA. We are a community with a strong philosophy, the foundation of our support building and conducting social, respective Diakonia activities.

It is not easy in Indonesian society and churches to work as a unmarried woman. Therefore, I hope we can continue our good communication and share about our services in the church or community." ☺

INDIA

Synthia Shoba Rani, Church of South India (CSI), General Secretary of CSI Women's Fellowship:

This year several programmes were conducted by CSI Women's Fellowship:

Bible Women Leadership Training Programme, Administrative and Managerial Skills Training Programme in Karnataka, Telugu, Kerala, Tamil Nadu. In spite of big challenges people love to participate in the programmes.

The "Food for All Campaign - Handful of Rice Movement" is an age old tradition of the church mostly being practiced till today in the village congregations.

Women in the house daily take a handful of rice and put it aside in a container. So on Sunday all church members bring the containers to the church. Rice will be collected in a big vessel. After prayer it will be given either to the sexton or to an economically backward family.

That's how the "Handful of Rice Movement" continues and ensures that no one should be "without a morsel of food". ☺

LEBANON

Wadia Badr
Helping Hand Society of the National Evangelical Church of Beirut:

The year 2015 was a very productive year for us. We set two targets for ourselves:

1. to help some refugees from Iraq and Syria
2. to help some needy people from our congregation

Thus we did many fundraising activities to fulfill these aims. As a result we contributed some clothes and \$4000 as scholarships for some students from refugee families, and around \$6000 as gifts at Christmas for needy and sick brothers and sisters from our community. We also packed food parcels on the feast of Thanksgiving, and distributed



them to needy people from all religions and denominations in order to express our thanks to our Lord and Savior for His many blessings.

Our Society operates primarily as a helping hand to our church. So in addition to the above, the ladies of the Society financially support the Moadieh Evangelical Center for the elderly that our Church runs. We also dedicate time and much effort on a weekly basis to spend with these elderly. We held our traditional Christmas celebration at the Center to share our joy with the residents and to celebrate together.

Our monthly meetings aim at strengthening our faith and sharing the love of Jesus Christ with each other, and spreading it to our society. We also invite speakers of different specialties to engage our minds and educate us. Gabriele Mayer was our speaker for the month of February 2015. ☸

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

On Friday 4 March the National Evangelical Church of Beirut's women and girls joined together with thousands of women around the globe in prayer. The World Day of Prayer this year was prepared by the women of Cuba who helped focus our attention on children and their place in God's Kingdom.

The English worship service was held at the Near East School of Theology where several women and young girls took turn in reading and praying. The meditation which was presented by Mrs. Nicolette Hutcherson encouraged

us to embrace the kids that surround us in Beirut, street kids made to live on sidewalks as well as the Syrian refugees who are only increasing in number and whose condition is decreasing in quality.

Two choirs of children contributed by singing hymns from their own traditions and in several languages. The first one an Armenian Orthodox choir chanted Armenian chants and the second one from the Armenian Evangelical Church sang to the beat of known evangelical tunes both in Arabic and in English. It was truly a blessed service. ☸



The Liaison Women of the International Women's Network



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PHOTO ON FRONT PAGE: private, Dorothea Schweizer with the three responsible sisters in the nursing home
right: Ms AHN Kyu Sook, head of nursing home
second from left: Ms HAN Eun Sook, head of home economics
left: Ms PARK Cheung Sun, nurse

TRANSLATIONS: from German: Bärbel Wuthe

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

*As a mother comforts her child,
so I will comfort you ...*

*Isaiah 66:13
New Revised Standard Version*



Evangelical Mission in Solidarity