

## **Women in Mission**

Women's Pre-Conference Message

New Safari Hotel, Arusha, Tanzania. 6 -7 March, 2018

Women have been prominent in evangelism and mission spreading the gospel of Jesus' life and resurrection since the time of Jesus. Women have holistically participated in and experienced mission. Understanding our existence as interconnected and interdependent, women from diverse cultural backgrounds have embraced mission as a life of love and service. We have been visionaries of the prayer movement for mission, creatively raised resources to support home and foreign missions, and have participated in education for economic and social empowerment and development, health care and missiological movements for justice, peace and reconciliation. However, for a long time these contributions were not acknowledged in the history of mission. Several examples of women's prayer movements for mission that were acknowledged include the World Day of Prayer, born in 1887 as a call for home and foreign missions, and the Fellowship of the Least Coin, founded in 1956 as a prayer and action for justice, peace and reconciliation. We also recognise the hidden prayer movements of women of colour around the world.

Much work has been done regarding women's access to theological education and the inclusion of—and appreciation for—contributions of women scholars in theological and religious education and training. However, the theological education and work environment remains not always conducive to women. Financial and age limitations for women's access still exist. In addition, women are often not hired as lecturers and professors in theological institutions, and when hired and promoted some receive less wages than their male colleagues. Moreover, our experiences are often not present or reflected in the curriculum development.

Acknowledging that the ecclesial landscape is changing and Christianity is shifting to the so-called global south, the need for diverse missiological and interreligious perspectives becomes imperative. This means that women's missiological perspectives and their ability to contextualise the biblical message in their intercultural and interreligious realities must be recognized. New ways of reading the bible that challenge patriarchal undertones have emerged. Yet, we must continue challenging cultural and traditional attitudes that are counter to the good news of salvation and liberation.

The women's pre-conference acknowledges that the existing images of the church called to mission are not inclusive of women's experiences and imaginations. The static understanding of the church structures does not allow full participation of all the people of God, especially women. With the global reality of limited access to leadership roles for women as well as existing prejudice against women's leadership, we therefore call the churches, mission agencies and the World Council of Churches to have intentionality for women's leadership roles.

We also acknowledge that many churches have been complicit, tacitly and intentionally, in perpetuating racism and discrimination particularly against persons who are historically unrepresented or people with disabilities. This has been reflected primarily in systems and structures of oppression, including the enslavement of persons and the trafficking of human beings. It has also been recognised that Christians have historically acted against the gospel participating in economic and systemic exploitation of resources especially in the so-called global south that has resulted in perpetual poverty, conflicts and wars. While we acknowledge that some churches have confessed the sin of racism and economic exploitation, it is not enough. This change in heart and mind (*metanoia*) will be a true sign of the move of the Spirit that leads to transformative discipleship and reconciliation.

Women also call the CWME conference delegates and participants to join in the mobilisation of churches, mission agencies and ecumenical partners to develop applicable teaching tools and resources to transform historical narratives to reflect the truth about policies that oppress and dehumanize. We need advocacy and awareness-building about the enslavement of persons, racism, xenophobia and homophobia. In the face of increased refugee populations, we recognize that the refugee and migrant crises are a product of war, climate change, and dehumanising conditions such as poverty, sexual and gender-based violence, conflict and famine.

After two days of reflection, *Women on the Move of the Spirit for Transformation* unanimously affirm that we are active and critical participants in *Missio Dei*. Accordingly, our stories, experiences, imagination and contributions are an integral part of what mission and evangelism should be. As such our prayer for this Mission Conference is that our stories of mission will be integral to the CWME story.

Therefore, we prayerfully recommend the following:

1. On this International Women's Day (IWD) we call churches to Press for Progress in Mission by mobilising to end sexual and gender based violence, and joining the Thursdays in Black Campaign for a world without rape and violence.
2. We call ecumenical theological institutions, particularly through Bossey Ecumenical institute and Ecumenical Theological Education department, Regional Ecumenical Organisations (REOs) and national council of churches, mobilized by the WCC, to have women leadership training that has within it mentorship and accompaniment strategies for younger women.
3. We call churches, through the CWME conference, to redress their historic participation in global systems of economic and systemic exploitation and oppression, through confession and concrete acts of repentance. We also call on the churches to commit to dismantling institutional racism in all its forms and to provide responses that are consistent with a process of restorative justice.
4. We recommend a theological anthropological reflection that provides a just and inclusive interpretation of the Imago Dei.
5. We call for gender main streaming to address disparities of women's access and involvement in theological education and that churches who engage in mission must resource and empower women's theological education.
6. We call churches to engage governments and hold them accountable on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2030, especially Goal 5 on gender equality and justice, the UN Decade in Solidarity with People of the African Descent (2014-2024) and the African Union Agenda 2063 as acknowledged by the WCC Central Committee.
7. We also call the WCC to continue carrying out annual gender advocacy trainings using the Convention to Eliminate all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and Universal Periodical Review (UPR) so as to equip member churches as part of faith based civil society that holds their governments accountable to the conventions and laws that they have ratified and contextualised.