

The Woman's Pulpit

October-
December 2022

NEWS ABOUT ORDAINED AND LAY WOMEN IN MINISTRY THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

IAWM Assembly: Wide Perspectives, New Friends

By Margarethe Galbraith-Cordes

Ed. Note: Margarethe was elected president of IAWM at our assembly on August 28. She is pastor of Holy Trinity and Hope Lutheran Churches in Beaver, PA, USA, and was ordained in 1990.

It was truly a joy and a blessing to have the opportunity to gather for an International Association of Women Ministers, IAWM, in-person assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, this year. I appreciated the fellowship we shared, the inspiration our speaker Dr. Andrea Bieler provided (see inside for a report on her lecture,) the place of rest and beauty that was the Bibelheim Bethanien retreat center where we stayed, and the wonderful food there.

The IAWM gathering was followed by the Pre-Assembly of the Just Community of Women and Men, one of the four program groups of the World Council of Churches meeting in Karlsruhe. That was followed by the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, which a number of us were able to experience. Our IAWM booth at the WCC welcomed women pastors and women in ministry from all over the world. About 250 photos were taken with women from Africa, Asia, Australia, many European countries, and South and North America. It was wonderful to hear voices and stories of joys and struggles in ministry and life from all over the world!

Thursdays in Black

At the Just Community of Women and Men pre-assembly workshops, the increase in violence towards women and children around the world was raised up, and we were invited to participate in the WCC's "Thursdays in Black" campaign. Thursdays in Black invites people to wear black on Thursdays to protest violence against women and make it

public, in attire and on social media using the hashtag #Thursdaysinblack. Many denominations and groups have adopted the campaign.

Personal Connections and Justice

How grateful I am to have had the opportunity to visit the gathering of the World Council of Churches. It was a wonderful gift to meet Christians from all over the world. At one of the plenary sessions, Christians from Ukraine spoke about

the challenges they are facing; another day, I had lunch with a Christian man from Palestine, and he shared what life is like for him and his family. I met a woman from Brazil, a native gentleman from the US, and many others as we talked about the need for water justice and climate justice.

Each day we gathered for worship, and different churches and individuals took turns leading the prayers and music. I feel renewed seeing how the church makes a difference all over the world by working towards peace and justice, and living out the grace and hope of our Lord Jesus Christ! The WCC theme was "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity."

May one of the blessings of this year's IAWM Assembly be a continued journey to become a more diverse community of women in ministry!

Inside:

- Photos
- Reports from WCC workshops
- Summary of IAWM Assembly actions
- Vulnerability and the Pandemic discussion



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Just Community of Women and Men Invited Us to "Visit the Wounds"

For two days just ahead of the World Council of Churches 11th Assembly, the four program areas of the WCC held their convocations.

Many of the women who had attended the IAWM assembly Aug. 26-28 then traveled in to Karlsruhe to attend some of these sessions. Indigenous Peoples, Youth, Ecumenical Disabilities Advocacy Network, and the Just Community of Women and Men all held plenaries and workshops.

The Just Community of Women and Men spent several sessions hearing from witnesses and survivors of violence, pain and ignorance in many places in the world. It was called "Visiting the Wounds." We were invited to experience a bit of what has happened to women in indigenous communities, in island nations, in violent homes, in oppressive societies; to visit their wounds, not to exploit or point but to visit as one might a friend.

One such session examined the mega-trends that reveal violence.. **Ronald Lathamiwa** suggested the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic will be with us in many ways, from the effects of the illness itself on so many, to the deaths suffered, and the injustices uncovered by the uneven distribution of vaccines.

Veronica Fletcher spoke of climate change and how harmfully it will play out if not enough is done to slow it down.

Sikhonzile Ndlouv said that how the media reflect gender roles contributes to the mega-trend of violence and hate against women and minorities.

Teaching theology in Cameroon and growing leaders through the accompaniment program in Palestine were held up as examples of nurturing leadership to address these wounds. We were invited to "feel the pain of gender-based violence, then act to create a better world."

by *Marian Shearer*

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Prayer Calendar Updates

Add to Nov. 19-25 new member:
Wilda J. Simon 109 Banyan Lane
Royal Palm Beach, FL 33411 USA
wildasimon@gmail.com Christian

New Email

Ute Young
young@theologinnenkonvent.de

New Addresses

Sarah Hooker 283 Somerset Ct
Lawrenceville, GA 30044 USA

Wendy Snook 5 Elda Ct Cranbourne
North, Victoria, Australia 3977

Can You Help Us Find New Emails for These Members?

Carmel Stabley
Beatrice Njoroje
Tenneh Nyeneme
Diane Monger
Thea Archinal
Christina Forestieri
Louise Crawford
Liz Hernandez
Rosemond Opoku Mensah
Pauline Wanjiri Njiru
Joy Noble
Maurine Redenbach

Send to **Carol Brown**,
csbrown550@hotmail.com

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Vulnerability As Solidarity: Bieler's Lessons from the Pandemic

By Marian Shearer

The COVID-19 pandemic brought forth in a huge way how we relate as a human family, said practical theologian **Prof. Andrea Bieler** of the University of Basel. She was speaking to the biannual assembly of the International Association of Women Ministers, meeting in Germany in August ahead of the World Council of Churches Assembly in Karlsruhe.

The complexity and ambiguity of how the pandemic has been a threat to life also created new spaces to relate to one another, she said. As an example, ministers report that "the most dreadful thing about COVID in my life has been doing ministry on line, not in person." But it has also revealed the many dimensions of vulnerability. When we care for our wounds (vulnerability is from the Latin "vulnus," wound) we may experience threat and ambiguity, but such caring can also bring love.

Vulnerability can be:

- a force for transformation
- a source of a sense of powerlessness and lack of agency

- ambiguous, because of the complexity of needs: for instance, the love shown by caregivers of COVID sufferers, even though they will not know the patients after they leave the hospital. We all live at times, Bieler said, in asymmetrical caring relationships.

Biblical references about vulnerability include 2 Corinthians 1, "we have this treasure in clay jars," and Paul's assertion that we "carry the death of Jesus in our bodies to show that the power is God's.

Author Shelly Rambo, Bieler said, reminds us that the Resurrected One we encounter still bears the signs of violence done to him in the crucifixion.

Jesus himself, said Bieler, was open to enter those exchanges of healing with others because of his own vulnerability and openness to the pain of others. Jesus was in some ways the picture of protest against the machine that killed him.

All humans share a fundamental vulnerability, Bieler said, in our infant dependence, in aging, in dying. At such times we must attend those things we cannot control and have not chosen, and give up expectations of perfect control. Such situational vulnerability "kicks in," she said, and we oscillate between caring and being cared for.

To have solidarity with those suffering and vulnerable, we can offer:

- safe space, safer than that of most refugee camps, for example

- health care and vaccines
- education, food, living situations that are not life-diminishing or life-threatening.

Vulnerability is not a sign of weakness or a drawback, she concluded, but a necessary way of being open to the world and in solidarity with the most vulnerable.

IAWM's New Website Is Live!

www.womenministers.org

Check out photos, history, back issues of the Pulpit, and more.

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IAWM Elects New President

The Rev. Margarethe Galbraith-Cordes, Pastor of Hope and Holy Trinity Lutheran churches in Beaver, Pennsylvania, was elected president of the International Association of Women Ministers at its biannual assembly in August in Germany.

Galbraith-Cordes has been vice president since IAWM's assembly in Pittsburgh in 2019. In 2021 the assembly was on line due to COVID risks; so the officers agreed to serve until 2022. Galbraith-Cordes succeeds the **Rev. Dr. J. Dorcas Gordon**, of Toronto, president since 2019.

In other business the assembly received financial reports from treasurer Carol Brown and minutes of previous meetings from secretary Cynthia Walton-Leavitt.

The advent of the new IAWM web site was noted, and a media team was appointed to keep the site up to date, and broaden IAWM's presence on social media: **Vimary Couvertier-Cruz** of Chicago and **Liddy Gershman Barlow** of Pittsburgh.

Several members were present on Zoom during the main sessions (see the picture on page 1 which includes the laptop!) The Zoom participants had such wonderful conversations that they suggested an occasional meeting of members on line between assemblies, for fellowship or for discussion of ministry topics.. The executive committee will propose dates at its October meeting.

Members are welcome to join the team planning IAWM's 2024 assembly, perhaps in Puerto Rico. Email Margarethe at megcordes@icloud.com.

Women Power: Beyond Ordination

What is the situation for ordained women around the world? Two workshops at the World Council of Churches Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, Sept. 2, heard from several women.

The first woman was ordained in the **Moravian Church of Tanzania** in 2000. Now, reported **Mary Katagile**, there are 240 female pastors in six of the church's regions while two still refuse to ordain women.

Most women, she reported, serve as assistants in parishes led by men. If woman power equals leadership, there is little opportunity for it; only two of the 36 districts are headed by women. Such leaders are chosen by vote of church members; it seems women will not elect other women to such positions.

Katagile taught in the theological school before she was allowed to be ordained. "I had to wait ten years before I was ordained" she said. "I was trusted to teach pastors but not to be ordained myself." Some still challenge the marriages of women pastors and leaders, as though only single women could serve. "Still, we are hopeful," Katagile said. "Why? Because things are slowly changing."

"It took me years to trust myself that God can use me, woman or man. I rediscovered myself when my husband died and left me with seven children, in my second year of education. It was a bitter pill for me, but I had to be strong. This is it."

She wants to convince women they can serve as God calls and equips, despite the injustices of her society such as inheritance and land-owning limits for women.

The **Presbyterian Church in Canada** agreed to ordain women in 1967 and ordained the first one in 1968, after years of debate. The **Rev. Dr. J. Dorcas Gordon**, principal emerita of Knox College, Toronto School of Theology, started seminary in 1969 as one of five women in the class. By the second year Gordon was the only woman left. Even though she received a scholarship for the highest marks, she said, classmates dismissed this: "You probably got this because you are a woman."

By the mid-1980s, though women were being ordained, a male candidate insisted that due to his individual conscience he could not ordain women. Then clergy from Ireland and Australia made this claim and proposed to revoke women's ordination. "Women in Canada felt abused," Gordon said, "like physical assault by all the old arguments against women."

But the next stage, Gordon said, was not opposing women openly but subversively. Search committees made excuses; women began to feel unsure of themselves. In 1992 a woman was elected moderator of the PCC General Assembly; when abuse was threatened, she wore a Kevlar vest to meetings. When Gordon was appointed as the principal of Knox College, people raised stupid questions about her qualifications and even her marriage, she said, "leading me to work far too hard at the job." In 18 years she learned to reflect on how her upbringing as a pastor's child taught her to be cautious, feeling "equal but not quite." Despite the enculturation of women's inequality, she had to learn to trust her intuition and years of experience. She said, "I developed a robust hermeneutics of suspicion."

What keeps her going? Developing a sense of humor, she said, and trying to stand loose to all the troubles. "God calls me, and God knows what God's doing."

Magdalena Zimmermann, who works with the **Mission 21 project of the European churches**, asked, "Why there is discrimination and violence against women in every culture?" It is the culture, she said, the upbringing, and misinterpretation of the Bible. Women often seem to be against women in leadership, she said, because they have learned how to exercise informal power, since they have not been given real authority.

Called to Preach: Four Stories

Protestant Methodist Church in Benin

The role of women pastors in Benin is limited, said the **Rev. Fifame Fidele**, 24 years ordained, school principal, professor of ethics at the Protestant University, and author of books on feminism.

There are 32 women pastors out of 400, she said; how did we get there? Women and men pastors get the same training, she observed, but sometimes women do better, despite sexual harassment during their training. And more opportunities are given to men than women, even when their qualifications exceed the men's. Even well-trained women Ph.D.s get no positions, "and must obey less qualified men," she said.

But when men fail to come to an agreement over a thorny problem, suddenly it's "Women, come and help," she said. "The future of the church cannot be built without women, because they bear life, and bear the faith forward."

Catholic Women's Association of Germany

Women, of course, are not ordained in the Roman Catholic church, but **Regina Schulz**, a teacher of religion, found herself in a pulpit this past May. "As a Roman Catholic studying theology, it never occurred to me that one could be ordained. But on the 14th of May, I went into the pulpit to preach, and it felt very normal to me."

Yes, this is what you can and should do, she heard herself saying: and why are you not allowed to do it? So the women's organization took action and planned "12 Women in 12 Places preaching 12 Sermons," for May 14. In her diocese, Schulz said, there were even 12 more who preached a few days later on the day of the Apostle Junia. The RC church "reformed" in Germany, she said. "Maybe they are afraid we will still be reforming?"

Cont., p. 6

Lutheran Church of Latvia to Repeal Women's Ordination

On June 3, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia voted to amend its constitution to explicitly deny ordination to women.

Lauma Zusevica, Archbishop of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad, responded. "After listening to the presentations of many of the Synod's clergy against those clergy members of the ELCL (against) the resolution that states that only male candidates need apply for ordination, the vote did not really surprise me," she said.

Archbishop Zusevica addressed the Synod at the very end of the day, the only time she was allowed to speak. "I shared that our church is deeply saddened. They had totally disregarded the fact that it is God who calls one to ordination."

The church tests and affirms that call, she said, "But by their action they had chosen to disregard Christ's role or the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the initial call to serve the church with the total commitment ordination entails."

The archbishop said the decision has grave implications for the eventual unification of the church in Latvia and the church abroad. "I can't see how they would be willing to work with us, given that their decision ultimately reflects a lack of mutual respect."

Any congregations who wished to join the church abroad would face losing their property and assets. (From *Latvian Public Broadcasting*, June 8, 2022)

German Bishop: Season of Creation Is A Time for Facing Uncomfortable Questions

The leading bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany, **Kristina Kuhnbaum-Schmidt**, is the commissioner for creation care of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). During the first week of the Season of Creation observed by churches in the Lutheran World Federation, she called on churches in Germany and the global North to scale up their climate efforts to "preserve our planet's habitability."

Kuhnbaum-Schmidt spoke during the World Council of Churches assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, in early September. "Human freedom to enjoy and use life and God's creation includes the responsibility to treat the creation we belong to with care and to preserve it for future generations," she said. However, especially concerning matters of climate justice, we must answer some uncomfortable questions.

Are we prepared, she asked, to maintain a more modest and sustainable lifestyle and to view this positively?

It is impossible, she said, to overlook that we live in a human-made climate crisis that threatens all life on our planet.

"As Protestant churches in Germany, we should take clear steps." Every church "should set binding climate goals that we commit to and act on."

Many churches in the ecumenical family observe the Season of Creation between September 1 and October 4, the Feast of Francis of Assisi in Western tradition. This year's theme is "Listen to the Voice of Creation."

(*Lutheran World Information*)

Brazilian Anglicans Celebrate First Ordination of a Woman by a Woman

The Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil on Sept. 25 saw the priestly ordination of the **Rev. Selma Almeida Rosa**.

"The unprecedented thing about this ceremony is that it was presided over by a woman: this is the first time this has taken place in Brazil," reported *Women's Ordination Worldwide* on line on Oct. 7.

The Diocese of Parana reported that the ordinand, the preacher and the bishop were all women. The diocesan bishop, **the Rt. Rev. Magda Guedes Pereira**, presided over the rite of ordination.

"It is with great joy that we record the priestly ordination of Selma Almeida Rosa. . .at Sao Lucas Parish in Londrina. It was a time of blessings for the life and mission of the Anglican Diocese of Parana," the diocese reported.

(*Women's Ordination Worldwide*)

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.

He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people.

In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.'

For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'

And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says.

And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them?

I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Luke 18:1-8, New Revised Standard Version

Walker-Smith Elected as WCC North American President

The Rev. Dr. Angelique Walker-Smith of the National Baptist Convention, USA, is one of eight regional presidents elected at the World Council of Churches (WCC) International Assembly in Germany in early September. She is currently the national senior associate for Pan African and Orthodox Church Engagement at Bread

for the World in Washington, D.C.

She is a current member of the WCC Central Committee and is also engaged in the work of the National Council of Churches (USA.) As North American President for the WCC she will promote ecumenism and interpret the work of the World Council in their respective regions. The presidents are ex-officio members of the Central Committee.

Walker-Smith is also president of the Historic Black Church Family of Christian Churches Together, and she was an initiator of the Pan African Women of Faith Ecumenical Empowerment Network (PAWEEN). She has degrees and honors from Yale University Divinity School and Kent State University. She received her doctorate from Princeton Theological Seminary.

Also elected were **The Rev. Dr. Henriette Hutabarat-Lebang** from Gereja Tora, a Reformed Church in Indonesia, as regional president for Asia; and **The Rev. Dr. Susan Durber** of the United Reformed Church (United and Uniting) as regional president for Europe.

From the WCC weekly news

Other WCC Tidbits

This issue of The Woman's Pulpit does not strive to be a full summary of all that happened at the World Council of Churches International Assembly. Please visit www.oikoumene.org for reports and wonderful picture galleries from each day.

From the plenary on "Affirming Justice and Human Dignity": "Even those churches no longer complicit in outright racism are often complacent about their history of colonialism."

Called to Preach Cont. From P. 4

The Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar, or Malagasy Reformed Church, has 1,750 pastors, of whom just over a quarter are women, said the **Rev. Lalaina Rajaonah**.

The denomination has nearly 8000 congregations gathered in 2056 parishes. On average, therefore, Rajaonah said, a pastor should be responsible for five churches; but reality is that in some cases one person leads a single congregation but others are responsible for up to 50 grouped together. Along with the denomination's goal to establish a new church each week, this has raised the need for pastoral leadership, and led to an upsurge in women accepted into seminary.

Women in Malagasy society have historically been proscribed to home, farm and family, though there were societies ruled by queens in past centuries. Such cultural and attendant financial limitations have meant fewer women getting educated.

But, she said, some issues come from the church itself: it encourages women to take responsibility but then treats them as weak and fragile, considering them to be "fanaka malemy," something that breaks easily. So women pastors, for instance, are considered only at the more accessible city parishes, when openings are often in landlocked areas or very far from the city.

These limits "put a stumbling block in the realization of the vision of the church itself," Rajaonah said. But the direct experience of women pastors contradicts the assumption: "I myself was appointed to lead a

parish of eight congregations around 30 kilometers apart, where the means of transport are two feet or perhaps two wheels, and the farthest is a three and a half hour walk." Women pastors can play an essential role in the church's growth plans; and the statistics of the department governing parishes show that parishes led by women develop more, and encounter fewer problems, whether interpersonal, financial or material.

There has never been theological debate on the subject of women's ordination, Rajaonah said; the discussions have been more practical than theological. "But," she concluded, "isn't this open door still half closed, in view of the problems discussed above?"

When the **Presbyterian Church in Korea** gathered in assembly in 2021, there were only 34 women among the 1500 delegates. One result was that the church appointed a Gender Justice Department—with no women in it.

"But we are not just sitting and crying," said **Dr. Eunha (Eunice) Kim**, Korean theologian and guest professor. "We were picketing, standing up to our giant rock, shouting in front of the General Assembly."

But besides making noise, the Korean women found in the World Council of Churches' Just Community of Women and Men a new space, making room for women to preach. And they promoted networks like the Korea Institute for the Study of Ecclesia and Life and the Korean Women Theologians Network.

And they found an opportunity to stand in solidarity with other women seeking leadership in their churches. **Romella Robinson**, the first woman ordained in the Pakistan Presbyterian church, was told she could not wear a clerical shirt or preach in public. So Romella designed a freestanding clerical collar and began to wear it. Korean women were so taken with the idea that they produced 100 of the black and white collars and distributed and sold them at the WCC.

Joyful Faces in Germany

IAWM exhibition booth at the WCC in Karlsruhe, Germany. We had 250 women's pictures on the wall by the last day.

Below:
Margarethe Galbraith-Cordes, IAWM's new president; Dorcas Gordon, now past president; Cynthia Walton-Leavitt, secretary; Ruth Kim, Korean theologian; Xinyue Zhang, theological student from China; Liddy Gershman Barlow, one of the exhibit booth team members.



In the News

Marlene Whiterabbit Helgemo, an indigenous ministry leader in the United Church of Christ and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, died July 22. She was 75. She was the first indigenous woman ordained in the ELCA, and served ELCA and UCC parishes in Minneapolis. She also worked as an advocate in national church settings such as the UCC's Council for American Indian Ministries. (From Celeste Kennel-Shank's obituary in The Christian Century, October 2022)

The United Church of Canada elected **Carmen Lansdowne (Kwisa'lakw)**, theologian and pastor, to serve as moderator of the denomination. The election, July 23, makes Lansdowne the second indigenous person to serve in the role. While moderator, she

will be on leave as executive director of the First United Church Ministry Society, a nonprofit ministry in Vancouver. (From Dawn Araujo's story in The Christian Century, September 2022)

The Rev. Barbara Breland joined Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, Rochester, NY USA, in July as Vice President for Finance and Administration. She is founding pastor of Destiny Temple of Faith United Church of Christ and the former designated pastor of Lincoln Congregational Temple UCC. She brings experience in accounting, financial analysis and risk management, along with her 25 years in ordained ministry

Martina Heinrichs, international director of the Fellowship of the Least Coin, was warmly welcomed at IAWM's international assembly in August in Germany. Heinrichs, from the Netherlands, told the assembly about the FOLC's ministry of prayers and actions for peace around the world, established to counter the prejudice that the organization's founder encountered after WWII. While FOLC is primarily a ministry of lay women, the assembly assured Heinrichs that the term "women in ministry" included her and the Fellowship's members. You may learn about their Circle of Prayer at www.fellowshipoftheleastcoin.org/circle-of-prayer.