

Message from the ACLC Women's pre-meeting October 4, 2019

PEMATANGSIANTAR, Indonesia/GENEVA

We, women leaders of the LWF member churches in the Asia Region, meeting prior to the ACLC in Pematang Siantar, North Sumatra, Indonesia, on 3 October, 2019, gathered around God's word and celebrating God's promises to us in Baptism.

Our theme: Pursuing Peace through interfaith Relations in Asia, reminded us that there is no peace without justice.

In the women's pre-meeting, we deliberated on the following:

- The LWF Gender Justice Policy,
- Sexual and Gender Based Violence,
- Women's Empowerment, Leadership and Human Rights,
- Women in the Ordained Ministry, and
- Transformative Theologies: re-reading the Bible with a Gender Justice lens.

We would like to communicate with our fellow church leaders regarding these topics.

Gender Justice Policy:

Gender Justice is not a "women's issue" but a profound issue of biblical and theological justice. Both men and women need to commit to this work as we share the same responsibility to implement living justice in our churches. The Priesthood of All Believers was and continues to be a cornerstone of our Reformation inheritance, identity and self- understanding.

Gender Justice begins in our Baptism. There we are welcomed into God's family where there is neither Greek nor Jew, slave nor free, male nor female. Though this is our shared baptismal vision and understanding, in reality, we do not fully lift up or live out the equality and dignity given to women by God.

We propose:

- The LWF Gender Justice Policy as a tool to help us implement this work for justice together in our churches. Though it was approved in 2013, many of our churches do not yet fully know, use or recognize this document. We urge the churches to take up this matter immediately and assign mixed teams, male and female, to help read, study, contextualize and implement a Gender Justice Policy in each member church.
- Gender Justice Policy must be implemented in Church Order, including Church Constitution, Worship/Devotion, and Liturgy, Theological education and identity and all the activities and projects in the church: Planning, Implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.
- We urge the churches to strengthen and empower women in order to live out their calling in God's mission. In this present time, we need all baptized believers to be brave and courageous to work on deep issues facing our churches. Women need to play a key role together with men to be in full partnership in decision-making and full participation in the life and governance of our churches.

Sexual and Gender Based Violence

Women are victimized in their everyday life through many forms of violence: verbal, emotional, physical, religious, etc. Women face discrimination in family, church and society. Examples include: Sexual and other forms of harassment, verbal violence, punishment of women, honor killings, girl child marriage, human trafficking and many others. The violence against women and girl children is increasing both in society and inside the church.

Violence is a present reality inside our churches.

The status of women in the church and church-related organizations shows that women, both lay and clergy face violence directly and indirectly by church leaders and others.

There are church leaders who abuse their power.

Women pastors are discriminated and punished for raising their voice to ask for justice. When we speak the truth, we are punished.

- Therefore, the church needs to face the problems of violence against women, train all leaders to overcome violence and create a space for discussion by

understanding the pain and agony of the victims and accompanying victims and perpetrators to find healing and justice.

- We propose that, in order to stop gender-based violence, church leaders should play an important role by being trained themselves in gender justice and overcoming violence, working and providing various teaching, spiritual and social tools to break the patriarchal mindset that creates wounds in the church, family and society.
- We urge church leaders to adopt codes of conduct in each church. We further urge the churches to address the deepening violence against women by promoting training, healing, learning and gender justice. Stop the stigma, stop the shame and break the silence around these issues!

Women's empowerment, women in leadership

Because Women bear an undue share and burden of care in the home, family, culture and churches, women's leadership is hampered.

In the culture, women are shackled by cultural, social, and psychological factors, and the churches themselves do not respect women's calls and leadership, so women are relegated to care issues, serving in the family and church, rather than continuing their leadership.

Church leaders often do not support or accept the programs planned by women. They minimize and dismiss women's ministries and church leaders do not empower women to lead, and give no budget for our work, programs and activities.

- We urge church leaders to empower, prioritize and support all women, both lay and clergy in their leadership development. They need to support in planning and conducting programs and to provide budget for programming. Women must have full participation in all church governing bodies, including full participation in decision-making at all levels.
- We further urge the churches, particularly the male leaders to study and work on gender roles and responsibilities in order for men to understand and address their complicity in systems of patriarchy that discriminate, oppress, marginalize and violate the dignity of women.

Women in the Ordained ministry

Our churches practice discrimination and promote power imbalances and in their different understanding, treatment and practices regarding men and women. For example, the women's call is not considered equal to the men. In the case of a clergy couple, the husband's call is given priority, more power and authority, further minimizing women's call and marginalizing her leadership. In some churches, women are not ordained to be pastors, but just act as evangelists. They are not given roles and responsibilities equal to men.

Some church leaders practice prejudice and discrimination. They question young female candidates regarding purity, menstruation, sexuality and other deeply invasive and inappropriate questions. Women have experienced sexual harassment within the churches. Women are excluded from preaching and teaching during menstruation and pregnancy and even deprived of ordination because of antiquated, superstitious, and unchristian notions regarding purity and impurity.

God creates male and female both in God's image, equal in power and dignity. We urge church leaders to understand and accept that God creates men and women equally and defend women's dignity in order to live our call to ministry equally.

- We urge and encourage church leaders to carefully consider equal calls, vocation and opportunity to both men and women in theological training, empowerment and in the ordained ministry.
- We further urge church leaders to study and adopt the Gender Justice Policy in each church.
- We urge leaders to encourage women to utilize their gifts, including leadership and ordained ministry, empowering the whole church to encourage and lift up women's ministry as a God-given gift, spirit-filled and equal to men's call, vocation and ministry.

Transformative theologies:

In our gathering we worked together on a re-reading of scripture with a gender-justice lens. These re-readings help us to shed the patriarchal prejudice regarding women and their place in Jesus life, mission and ministry. They bring light, life and good news for our lives as believers and followers of Jesus.

- We urge church leaders to deepen their understanding of transformative theologies using a Gender Justice lens in order to bring more clearly messages of God's liberating, life-giving good news to their preaching and teaching in our churches.

Conclusion

Women deeply appreciate the support of the LWF for the opportunity provided to gather, have training and capacity building, empowerment and understanding in Gender Justice, Human Rights, Overcoming Sexual and Gender Based Violence and other vital topics to God's mission today.

We ask support from the churches to strengthen our networks between women and men, including opportunities for capacity building, training and empowerment.

Just as Jesus lifted up women throughout his ministry, we urge the churches and church leaders to do the same. We give thanks to God in Christ who continues to lift us up and empower us with the Holy Spirit to participate and lead in the mission that belongs to God.