

Women's Letter

The Women's Letter is a tool of sharing and strengthening the mission 21 women's network

it appears every year in June in the languages: English, German, Spanish and Indonesian



Justice

*«There is not male and female,
for you are one in Christ Jesus.»
(Galatians 3, 28b)*

*Contributions written by women in
Africa, Europe, Latin America and Asia*

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Balance of Justice
Marianne Herrera-Zweifel



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For many of our readers the price for the production and delivery of the Women's Letter would be a reason for the exclusion from this network communication. Therefore we are very grateful to those who enable us to offer the Women's Letter free of charge in four continents.



Dear Readers,

Injustice happens everywhere in this world, in both private and public matters, though our perception and evaluation of injustice may differ. As Christians we are called to resist. Having been baptized into Christ's body, we are obliged to seek justice in racial and gender conditions as well as in socio-economic problems according to the formula of baptism as recorded in Galatians 3, 28: «There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is not male and female, for you are one in Christ Jesus.»

This is precisely what our women in our sister churches and organizations are doing. Here we share just a few concrete examples of women and groups of women who are committed to justice on different continents. They have recorded their stories in varying life circumstances: in the newly created country of South Sudan, during a women's conference for regional leaders, they studied the various ways of experiencing injustice in their respective situations and what they were undertaking for its abolition. A Swiss theologian of Old Testament, Elisabeth C. Miescher, describes her engagement in this problem both at home and abroad. From Indonesia, we have the voice of Kamila Jusup, who is a leader of women's work in Bandung. She writes about her work and how she deals with domestic violence. Etel Nina Caceres reports on the legal situation of the rural population who experience discrimination through poverty and violence mainly as a lack of esteem. And then she introduces us to her work and her organization.

These women share the wisdom of discerning problems and violence in private as well as in public, of analyzing and naming structural demons. Furthermore, they try continuously to transform society through prayer and actions. Women's resistance is resistance in everyday life.

Though these experiences differ in substance, they have one thing in common: all these women stick persistently and steadily to their goal and do not give up. Although women often do not have the power of decision-making, their power is in the potential to bring about life-saving changes within their range of life and work. These examples show how they take on responsibilities within their manageable environment with the aim of reducing injustice.

To opt for the poor is to opt for women, for unfortunately, world-wide, women represent the majority of the poor and uneducated. And yet they are active subjects when it comes to preserving life and to improving the conditions of life for others. All these active women bear witness to the transforming call to seek God's kingdom first as we journey through life, whether women's work is visible or not.

It is with deep regret that we have to bid farewell to Marianne Herrera-Zweifel. We feel and express deep gratitude for all she achieved not least for the women's letter.

I am glad to introduce two women into this women's letter. There have been recent changes in the leadership of mission 21. While Dr. Christine Christ von Wedel is elected to president of Board, Rev. Claudia Bandixen is called as director. I am grateful for her open-minded spirit and willingness to support Gender and Women's issue in which she answered the questions when interviewed.

I wish you fascinating reading and good inspiration to continue courageously in your own steps.

*23rd February 2012, Basel
Rev. Dr. Meehyun Chung*

Justice in South Sudan

Women's Group, Presbyterian Church of South Sudan

Justice is part of life security. Justice is what God requires from us. God is justice. Justice is an individual right for everyone. Justice is a social right in the family, in the clan, and in the society.

1. What is justice to you?

Justice is being a faithful Christian. Justice is doing right things truthfully. Justice is equal rights. Justice is sharing things equally. Through justice we are able to love and forgive each other. Justice is free movement for everybody. Justice for me is when all the tribes of Southern Sudan line up together, work together and love one another. Justice begins from ourselves: how we live with our children and treat girls and boys, relatives and neighbors and how we serve food and other things. If I do not know how to do justice, how can I expect justice from others? Justice begins within me. Do I love all people? Do I want good things only for myself or also for other people?

Good governance is just. Equity is just. Decision-making out of tolerance is just. Man and Woman in unity and equity, this is just. Justice is a required standard of social behavior based on culture, norms, beliefs and customs. Justice is to set a person free in the court of law and declare innocent or guilty. Justice is to do what is right and just in the eyes of God and human beings. Justice is to justify someone who is not guilty or doing wrong. And above all: Justice is to give someone liberty and an opportunity to express his or her view freely.

2. How did you experience Justice?

When two people quarrel we have to judge them in the right way and consider the offender too with forgiveness of offender and forgiveness of victims. When a person is killed, parents and relatives plus others come together, discussing what to do, in order not to reveal the person since revealing is not ours to do, but belongs to God. When boys and girls are both sent to school, they have the same duties equally. Both parents make decisions. Yes, since I love all the people, I experience justice in myself.

Justice is not found by tribes if everyone promotes his/her tribe, and only loves his/her tribe. Justice is when people do good things for each other. We often still live in contradiction to God's will. None of Southern Sudanese woman experience justice up to now. Maybe from now onwards, but still in church, in the family, in the society, in the government, 25 % of justice does not work. If the land is property of the family and a man and woman can inherit equally, we gain justice in court and through the last will of our fathers and mothers, or our husbands. If divorce allows a man and woman to share their common property and care for the children equally, then we have justice. Wherever and whatever is affecting us, we make claims for our rights in court according to civil law or customary law. Women and men can register for a piece of land now, which is justice. If a man and woman marry and discuss their future together, this is justice.

3. How did you experience Injustice?

The lack of justice in the society or community in which the innocent are denied justice, then they become victims of injustice. Injustice gives unfair treatment and judgment. Injustice encourages partiality and bribery. Injustice is when the right of someone is not considered while the other one has freedom or rights, e.g. forced marriage. The man is saying to the woman that she has no rights. The woman is told not to make decisions. The women are not equal with men. The women are only given 25 % quorum in the government and administration by the constitution (Republic of South Sudan) because women are under men's responsibility and power. Women as mother's of the house have nothing to say, only sometimes in the affairs of the household. Also in the church women are not making decisions, it is done by the clergy/minister, but

females are the majority in church meetings. If you talk as a woman in church they will say: What kind of woman is that who dares to talk in front of men and pastors? The women in the government are not fully participating; employment is a problem in finance, ministry of religious affairs and other important offices. The women do not have equal opportunities finding a job or gaining education, especially in Upper Nile State. We have so many young ladies in poor labor. They need education and upgrading in the church to gain respect. The advantage of one child being favored creates injustice in the family. Resources which are not shared like food, money and ideas produce injustice. If love towards children remains unequal, we will produce injustice. If there are too many children in the house, and the resources are scarce we will find injustice. The relationship of girls and boys, women and men are unjust. The custom that only females have to serve in family, church (deacons) and society is unjust. The exclusion of the sister-in-law after marriage creates injustice. Also the exclusion through the use of only the mother tongue in the presence of others (non speakers) creates injustice.

Women should remain silent in the church: 1. Cor. 14:34-35; Eph. 5:22; 1. Tim. 2:11-13. These are references of the Bible that preach submission of women, and wives to the husband. These references are exploited by Christians to suppress women. According to the above references there is no justice to women. To read these literally is injustice. These verses should be reinterpreted according to context of that time and adjust to our time.

4. What were you able to do facing Injustice?

Women are able to go to school, now. Women can get ordained in the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan and attend bible school courses. Women are able to work with NGOs, government, become ministers, officers etc. Women are able to make decisions about social problems among the community. Women are able to practice gender equality; pray and fast for peace and unity; and share the word of God with our people in public. If we believe in God, he will transform us. I do justice in my house. As an individual I may talk first, explain



Workshop participants of the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan: Photo: Meehyun Chung

and discuss in a meeting or in the family. If I cannot manage on my own, I may gather more people about the topic of injustice. If I see unjust behavior, I can intervene. In general, a talk-show, drama on the radio or television can create awareness about injustice. Knowledge about regulations, orders, law and constitution can promote justice. In a difficult situation mediation can prevent injustice. Citizens can write resolutions, petitions, and have demonstrations against injustice. The exchange of ideas helps women and men in unjust situations to overcome.

2011, Malakal, Sudan, November 2011

Initiatives towards justice

How I experienced justice and injustice in my context and today: my personal struggle
Elisabeth Christa Miescher, theologian in Basel, Switzerland

Injustice regarding women and a Swiss-centered attitude have marked me as a young girl. I realized that my unmarried godmother had to pay taxes from her income but had no right to vote. I was outraged that women were denied their public vote; so at an early age I used to discuss that issue without knowing anyone from the women's right movement. But I knew that German women had the right to vote.

Another experience challenged me. In May 1945 after the end of the Second World War Switzerland thanked God that he had held his hand over our country and protected it. I did not agree. God was caring for everybody, and other children in other countries needed him as well. He definitely was not God just for Switzerland. A third event shocked me some months later. Why should a terrible nuclear bomb kill so many people? And why did adults say I was a good and just end of the war? I simply could not understand that and a terrible fear stayed deep in me.

In my family nobody understood my critical questions. So I stopped talking about my concerns. I kept them deep in my heart. I continued to see injustice, I was sensitive and disagreed. Much later I learnt that I am not alone, that many persons before me and some around me had struggled against injustice, and had often failed. Even when I was studying at the university many fellow-students did not share my concerns; but by then I felt strong enough to discuss and might even convince one or two to agree to a vote for women or to see the danger of nuclear weapons. My first encounter with Dorothee Sölle and her political worship events in Cologne became a crucial moment: she was a clever woman with a clear vision whom many men criticized. She gave a lecture at Basel University in the main hall and afterwards we sat in a round in a local pub. I felt nurtured and motivated to do something simi-

lar in my town. I joined a group which organized political evening services in analogy to Cologne from 1968-1970. I want to share with you three of my initiatives.

What can I do to dismantle and stop nuclear weapons? 1983, on Hiroshima Day thirteen women and men started fasting. «Fast for Life» they called it, to convince the countries with nuclear weapons to destroy them. I knew one of the women, Solange. She was my age, had three boys like me; when our children were small we had met a lot. I could not stop thinking of Solange. The fast was unlimited – she would die. My husband gave me the idea to write an open letter to the newspaper of my town, Basel, which was published. That is how the fast became known. Later on I met a group fasting for a week. When Solange was near to die, most of the thirteen gave up. Small groups carried on fasting, each for a week, and so the fast continued till December. In November I joined the group in Basel; I discovered the potential of this political and spiritual experience, and how I changed when fasting. - In the following years I often kept a fast before Easter or from 6 - 9 August, from Hiroshima-Day to Nagasaki-Day, Our group met once a day, to share our insights, to pray together, and to write letters to governments of nuclear nations. We even got some answers. – Such protests have helped me to overcome resignation and feelings of powerlessness, They foster energy and the courage to continue.

How Switzerland copes with asylum seekers has been another concern. There are many ways to engage myself, e.g. in collecting signatures against new and more restrictive laws, so that we will have a public vote. But at several occasions I was on the losers' side! – Once I had a personal success: a couple with a six months old boy had to leave Switzerland. They were from the Kurdish minority in Turkey. I knew about the depressions of the mother and that her

father had threatened to kill her. I had these letters translated. But how could I prove the dangerous situation? I came across a woman psychiatrist, who



Two grandmothers - Women's Demonstration near by Bethlehem, Palestinian Mother's Day March 2007, Photo: Team colleague from WCC

was shocked and interfered before the chairman of the psychiatrists. He went to the Swiss head of the office for refugees and argued. His intervention made them protect women that are threatened within their families. Not only did this family get a permit to stay, the Swiss authority became aware of a special danger for women. – Why did I engage myself? I knew this couple from my work in a conference center. I became the Swiss grandmother for the two boys. I cannot help all asylum seekers, but at least one family. That is more than nothing.

I am a member of the Iona Community in Scotland. There I met Jan, who told me she was going to Palestine for three months, to work in the program of the WCC as ecumenical accompanier/EA. I felt immediately: I want to join this program. This work could be a small contribution for peace in Israel and Palestine. My husband would not agree at first. It took some time, until I was accepted as EA; by then my family was supporting me. I worked in a team in Bethlehem with two other women from USA and Sweden and a man from Ireland. These three EAs were forty years younger than me, but we became a very good team, sharing our gifts and our potentials. One of our tasks was our regular presence at the large checkpoint in Bethlehem. We had to visit en-

dangered villages, to be present at demonstrations against Israel's stealing of Palestinian land, to cooperate with other NGO's, to teach English in one of the refugee camps, to visit the different churches in Bethlehem and to participate in an interreligious women's group – all that was part of our presence. I EAs have been wearing their beige vests with the WWC logo, so they are visible in their identity. We used to go as pairs. I chose the Checkpoint presence as my main task, To many men I was a mother figure, therefore I had no problems to interfere in disputes between some men or with soldiers. Waiting for hours to get through the checkpoint created a tense and nervous atmosphere. Yet I was astonished how well many among them seemed to cope with the long procedure of at least three hours to get to work. All these men, some women and some school-children were seen and treated as terrorists by the soldiers. - If the soldiers did not open the gate at 5 o'clock, we could use hotlines to make calls, Sometimes I called the commander, which was often the most successful way. To watch the humiliation of these people was very difficult – and we could only imagine how much energy they needed to endure that. How would they come home in the evening? I have often prayed to God to send his holy Ruach, his spirit to the Israeli government... I will keep to pray and to argue with God.

When we went to the Friday demonstrations, we sometimes could talk to soldiers; then they moved a little back. But we could not stop them cutting down olive trees and stealing land for roads and illegal settlements. Sometimes we felt worn out. Yet we often heard that our presence made a difference; we were seen, heard and the soldiers might refrain from more harassment. When I was in Jerusalem on a day off, unknown men talked to me and thanked me for my presence at the checkpoint. What have I learnt? To watch, to be seen, and to report home are of equal importance. I want to be informed and to be a witness for the brutal injustice done to the Palestinians. The work on ground in Palestine is badly needed: many teams have come since 2007 and have gone back to their countries to give talks and show pictures. Each of us can be active where she/he lives. We hope that God's kingdom, justice and peace, will come. We will discover light in the darkness.

Women and access to justice

Lic. Etel Nina Cáceres, Director of ISAIAS¹, Peru

To look at reality shows us, that women's access to justice is still utopia. This is especially true for poor women in the Andes (mountainous area). Poor women suffer from double discrimination, first from poverty and secondly from being female.

They experience inequality in daily life due to exclusion from school as girls and to domestic and nursing duties at home which deprive them of spare time. Women in their teens often become early single mothers; they endure inter-familial and sexual violence frequently and their chances on the public and private labor market are mean.



The Women's Commission demonstrate women's aims of political decision. One of them has been elected member of the Parliament.
Photo: Regula Schmid, Bethlehem Mission Immensee

There are plenty of additional items. However, the long list can be summarized as follows:

Concerning access to justice women find themselves confronted with the following barriers: poverty, violence, discrimination and racism, minor possibilities in decision making both in private as in public. It is therefore always a tough challenge to create justice for women in daily life.

Poverty

In Peru's rural areas poverty is still the biggest challenge for about 60% of the population. Indigenous women in the Puno area are the ones affected most. Among them you find

the highest percentage of illiterates and the lowest level of education. They are the most vulnerable members of the population. Thus Peruvian poverty has a female, indigenous face. Women are the poorest among the poor.

Violence

In addition to structural violence women in the Andes are exposed to further kinds of violence: physical, psychological and sexual violence. Approximately one million women are abused by their husbands or partners yearly in Peru. Nothing is done in the Puno area for

¹ ISAIAS: Instituto Surandino de Investigación y Acción Solidaria – Sout Andes Institute for Investigation and Action in Solidarity

the prevention or a change of this situation. The high rate of violence shows that the traditional macho-culture still prevails and that all of us, women as well as men, must deal with this problem. Violence against women is underestimated on various levels in the government. Yet in view of the high number of murdered women (since 2009 405 women were murdered in Peru) the ministry of women drafted a new law to avenge the crime of murdering women. This law was adopted by congress on 1st December. Whoever kills intended a related person, a progenitor, an offspring, adoptive parents or someone living together with, whether in co-habitation or in marriage, will be imprisoned for 15 – 25 years.

We think that this new law and the new social policy will help diminishing violence against women. But it is important too, to work out common programs for advancing mental health by strengthening good intercourse and a friendly culture among the people. These programs should start at the family and school level, in churches and other institutions with the aim of shaping agents of a culture of peace. It is only in this way that we can strengthen social peace.

Discrimination

In spite of progress in women's rights there are today still many who believe, that women can only become housewives and mothers. They believe that women's intellectual capacities are still underdeveloped and that, therefore, there must be a difference in salaries. Discrimination of women violates the principle of equal opportunities and the right to human dignity. It is an obstacle for women's taking part in cultural, political, economic and social life. Discrimination is a form of violence and social marginalization. Our approach is by strengthening women through women's organizations. Therefore we renew our demand for a decree for the elimination of economic,

social and cultural discrimination of women and for the implementation of a gender equal education. We demand also that the media take responsibility for preventing violence, especially violence against women..

What to do?

The main reasons for the lack of women's access to justice are discrimination, marginalization and poverty. In order to get really an access to justice, we need a change process. This will not be possible without the empowerment of women. Women should determine their own priorities and introduce them to processes at political level. For the implementation we should have access to control. We must develop appropriate social models and counterbalance inequality and discrimination.

Indigenous women are not only victims but also actors in the development of innovative processes. They should be recognised as actors of changing culture and giving life.

In our Peruvian women's network we took initiatives to empower women at the grassroots. We organized courses on the item: «deepening of political knowledge - enhancing leadership skills for women to greater participation and increased opportunities for political control by women.» With this support we strengthened the influence of women in local development.

May the Virgin Mary, mother of God, who herself has experienced the joy of being mother and woman at the same time, quicken hundreds of woman in the rural area. And may she support the efforts and the daily struggle for an approach to justice, which is carried out by farm laborers, wives, sisters and daughters with the hope for a better world.

Say 'No' to injustice

Karmila Yusup, Coordinator Women's Group of the Pasundan Christian Church in Bandung, Indonesia

Women are connected with money: spending it and earning it. I would like to start with my own experience. I remember when I was in elementary school, my father said «You have to stop going to school.» I asked him, «Why?»

My father said, «Because you are a woman, you do not need higher education, your obligation is cooking in the kitchen and cleaning up a home, to serve your husband and your children». From then on, my father refused to seek finance for my education. Later, I heard from my neighbour that my father was disappointed when he knew that his baby was a girl. In reality many

Once their daughters are 15 or 16 years old, many parents send them to the cities, for example Jakarta, Bandung or Surabaya, as sex workers, to earn money for their family. The pattern of looking for money through selling their daughters as sex workers is a culture that has been passed on from generation to generation in Indramayu.



Women's Solidarity to overcome violence: Foto: Lucy Kumala

fathers think like my father. When I was a young adult and proposed to enter a theological seminary, scholarships were only for men, not for women. So I had to work hard to enter, and to finish my study of theology. Fortunately I managed it, and I have been ordained as a pastor.

My second story is from Indramayu, which is in the northern part of the coastal area of West Java. There is a great difference between this story and mine. In this area, parents are very happy if they have a daughter, because they think she will bring them a lot of money.

I worked as a minister in Pasundan Christian for 11 years. Almost every day I had to deal with victims of domestic violence. For example there was Nena. She was 30 years old and had two daughters. She worked in a private company and lived in her in-laws' home. Her husband and her husband's family often tortured her, so that she fled several times to protect herself from this violence. In her working place, even though she was married and had two daughters, her status as an employee was that of a single person.

So why is a woman worker paid less than a man? The reason is that she is not the head of a family. Nena experienced double injustice; in her family because of the domestic violence, and at work because of the salary system. Finally she decided to leave her family to become a migrant worker in Malaysia to get more money for her two daughters. What happened after she arrived in Malaysia? It is a sad story. Since she arrived in Malaysia around 9 years ago, there has been no news from her - even her two daughters did not hear from her. Is she still alive? We do not know!

These are only examples from the many cases of injustice – at the domestic level, in the church, and in society. We can clearly see that women are not valued as human beings that God has created in His image. Women are less important than men. They are only seen in connection with money (spending it or earning it) or as a commodity - decorative, fertile, and a cheap thrill.

Vashti's and Esther's courage overturned the world

What can we do to overturn the situation and to achieve justice around us? I would like to share our experience in facing gender injustice around us in Pasundan Christian Church and its neighbourhood. We have started reading the Bible with new eyes. That means, reading the Bible according to the perspectives of women and the marginalized. As a result of our re-reading of the Bible, we have met with Queen Vashti and Esther – two great women who lived long before us. What they did to fight gender injustice and racial injustice (Esther 1:1-2:4 & Esther 4 -7) inspires us to struggle for justice.

Queen Vashti just said 'no' to the king's command. One day King Ahasuerus decided to throw a party lasting six months. On the last day, the king wanted to display his wife, and he asked her to come out wearing her royal crown. The king wanted all those men who had spent six months eating his food and drinking his wine to take a good, long look at his wife. But Queen Vashti did not do what an obedient subject of the king ought to do when he gave a direct order. She said 'no' to coming out and making a display of her self for his benefit and his fun. She would not do it when the king had been drunk for one hundred and eighty-seven days.

Vashti struggled to break new ground – to demonstrate that women did not only exist to be decorative and fertile. She lost her crown, her position, her prestige and her good name in the eyes of the world when she said 'no' and was exiled. She inspired a pretty harsh law about wives being subservient to their husbands. But in the eyes of God, her behaviour was something different.

Vashti's courage inspired the women who came after her. After Ester was crowned queen, she faced the unjust situation that Jews in the empire were being threatened and systematically murdered. Esther decided to speak up on behalf of her people. I think Esther found the courage to do as she did because she had the example of Vashti, her predecessor, the woman who just said 'no' when she was treated as though women did not have a purpose other than being decorative and fertile. Esther was great to say 'no' to injustice (racial injustice and genocide), so that the Jews in the empire were not systematically murdered.

Queen Vashti and Esther inspire me to fight for eradication of all forms of injustice, for example gender injustice. To say 'no' does not mean only to 'say' it; we must develop strategies and action plans to realise gender justice and social justice. Then we need to build solidarity and partnerships. For example, to work for gender justice, we as a church are building up women's solidarity, church partnerships and networking at local, national and international levels. We are working for partnership between women and men, and building up networking and cooperation with interfaith institutions and NGOs concerned with gender justice.

Struggle together for justice

We are working in partnership with mission 21 for gender justice. We have built partnerships with The National Church Women's Association of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) which is fighting sex trafficking, and the Women's Rights Center in Indonesia. The Pasundan Christian Church is building a network for cooperation with interfaith organisations concerned with women's issues, which started in West Java Province, for the amendment of the Basic Law in Indonesia, to eradicate human trafficking and religious discrimination.

Interview with Claudia Bandixen

Interview with Rev. Claudia Bandixen, Director of mission 21, Basel Switzerland
By Rev. Meehyun Chung, Women and Gender Desk

The President of the board of the Aargau Reformed Church, Rev. Claudia Bandixen, will be the new Director of mission 21 from 15th July 2012. She has already been a member of the board of mission 21 since June 2011. As a welcome Dr. Meehyun Chung, head of the Women and Gender desk, asks the new Director a few questions. She has already cooperated with her in various contexts and has always felt her great support. For instance by supporting world widely women in taking up leadership positions. She also has procured women from her church for cooperating on the Women's Committee of mission 21 as well as at the European Continental Assembly. And her two children, now grown up, as well as her husband have engaged in our work with their experience and language skill. Therefore it is a pleasure to be able to introduce them here.

MC: Claudia, how were you confronted with the subject of women and gender for the first time?

CB: At the university we women were only present as a small minority. At that time we fought against being degraded to pretty miss who's only aim was to angle a husband with a title.

The gender subject was not only present at the university; later on, in the ministry, myself and my husband were among the first couples in Switzerland, who were elected into a full time ministry, where the wife was minister in her own rights and not just a supplement to her husband and dependent on his function. The

really big step forward in the problem I own to my work with the interdisciplinary women's program SEPADE in Santiago de Chile. My female colleagues there helped me discover new aspects of female theology and work with women. Without

them I would not have learnt that much nor got to value it. Later on, during the time of working on that subject scientifically, I enjoyed the privilege of



reflecting for myself anew the situations and the work of women.

MC: How did you deal with the subject as a young minister?

CB: In ministry you encounter all types of women and all possible forms of life and, as a young woman you just start off with what is there. Thus I organized a needlework afternoon for elderly women, prepared for bazaars and at the same time I organized together with local women a women's session where we worked on topics and discussed hot potatoes. And I valued especially conversations with women who lived in situations akin to my own experience.

MC: You have three children. How would you define gender aware education?

CB: (smiles) First of all children are a great joy. We reflected very little whether our education was gender aware or not. Children are more strongly formed by what they experience than by what their parents tell them. But I think they received good gender awareness in everyday life. Theory was asked for during adolescence. Then we frequently debated with our youth.

MC: You were in Chile for the Basel Mission as an ecumenical co-worker. What is your experience with the subject and your work there?

CB: In Chile I experienced a two-faced world as far as economy as well as gender is concerned. Chile is highly developed. The intellectuals stand in the forefront concerning progress as well as awareness. At the same time I experienced an almost complete marginalization of large parts of the population and – women were those at the very bottom. May be it is exactly for this reason that it was women's work which could truly move and change the basis.

MC: How were you changed by Chile? Which of those experiences do you consider important for your work here?

CB: Chile did not change myself alone, it has changed my whole family. First of all borders between states and races have disappeared. Chile has a certain structure and so has Switzerland. In Chile you find poor and rich, beautiful and ugly, intelligent and less gifted people ... in Switzerland it's the

same. After Chile borders appear to me artificial, I cannot agree anymore with appreciating one culture higher than another, but the world to me is a whole and all of us, whether we come from Chile, from Switzerland or from any other state, are humans standing before God with our sorrows and hopes.

MC: During your studies you focused on business ethics, gender and feminist theology. How would you like to develop these subjects further in your work with mission 21?

CB: mission 21 has already worked on these subjects for a long time. I am not so sure that my coming justifies speaking of a «new» emphasis. Let me remind you of Peter Gessler, Wolfgang Schmidt or Johanna Eggimann but of the KEM direction as well. Human dignity in all aspects has always been central. This is rooted in Christian faith which does not allow otherwise.

MC: What emphases do you have in work on women and gender, especially from the point of view of women, both in the global south as in the north?

CB: I am moved by human trafficking, questions of violence in general, development or rather strengthening of self-confidence and contextual theology for every day life, but consider important conscientious work with men and with various generations too. Women questions are not new. They are deep questions of justice, one's own identity and concrete context.

MC: Muchas gracias! God bless your work! Our women will remember you and your tasks in their prayers.

Info-Plattform

Congratulation

Honorary doctorate for the former Basel missionary Marie-Claire Barth-Frommel, intercultural theologian and feminist pioneer.

Great honour for Marie-Claire Barth-Frommel, Basel: In November 2011 the 84 years old theologian received the honorary doctorate from the theological faculty of Basel University.

The daughter in law of the famous theologian Karl Barth has advocated for 55 years the development of Indonesia. And she fights until today with quiet persistence for the cause of women in East and West. «If one works intensively in a minority, one finally belongs to it», says the pastor and theologian with a deep fervour for open, participative and common Bible study.



Marie-Claire Barth, born Frommel in 1927, was sent to Indonesia by the Basel Mission. Today she is known as Grand Old Lady of feminist theology, who backs up first of all the younger generation and encourages them to go their own way.



Parting

Marianne Herrera-Zweifel, Project Manager in the Women and Gender Desk, has resigned by the end of July 2012. We express our deep-felt thanks to her for her long-lasting and valuable work for 16 years and wish her well-being on her new path of life.

Hearty welcome

With Dr. Christine Christ-von Wedel as the new President of the board - beginning end of February - and Rev. Claudia Bandixen beginning in July as the new Director, mission 21 could win two experienced and very competent personalities. Further board members will be elected in the General Assembly, held from June 29th to 30th.

The General Assembly which united 25 delegates from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe at the end of February elected unanimously Dr. Christine Christ-von Wedel, a historian from Basel, as the new President of the board.

Her emphasis will be on strengthening trust between board and management, between committees, between the supporting associations and the continental assemblies, «that we may be able to fulfil our common duty of testifying to God's love in this world through word and deed».



Rev. Claudia Bandixen, President of the consistory (board) of the Ref. Church Aargau, will be Director of mission 21 in Basel this summer. She is 55 years old and is experienced in leading big church organizations and projects of mission 21. Gottfried Locher, President of the board of Swiss Evangelical Churches in Bern, called Bandixen – in connection with her move to mission 21 – «a widely acknowledged voice in Swiss Protestantism».

*You Jesus, you were born in a shelter in Bethlehem.
Today you and your parents could no longer
Travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem.
There is the separation wall.
As Jew and citizen of Israel you are not
allowed to enter your hometown.*

*Jesus, you lived in a time of war and occupation –
You died in utter despair at a cross on Golgatha
among criminals.
You die again and again with every woman,
man or child being killed.
Jesus, you are with the tortured ones.*

*May the light of the angels shine on each of them,
may that light also shine on the torturers,
on the soldiers that have to kill, and on their commanders.
May your light enlighten them
to find ways of reconciliation and peace.*

*Elisabeth Christa Miescher
January 24, 2012*

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The Women's Letter

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