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OUR VOICES

ems women's network



WOMEN LIVING WITH THE BIBLE



Association of Churches and Missions
in South Western Germany

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**Dear women,
dear sisters in the EMS network,**

"WomenLiving with the Bible" – under this slogan you find various contributions in the new issue of OUR VOICES 2007/2008. The main emphasis is placed on feedback from women from nine countries to the question why and how exactly they read the Bible. They cannot imagine their everyday life without reading the Bible. The spectrum of experiences and approaches is broad – no wonder when you regard the wide range of backgrounds.

What are the connecting themes and what are the differences? And where can we learn from each other? These questions are followed up in the contribution "The Word of God from Surabaya to Tema".

Elizabeth Aduama from Ghana tells biographically how she has been living with the Bible; the Bible has become her companion.

More than 80 groups worldwide participated in the EMS project "Reading the Bible through the eyes of another". Cornelia Hole resumes the unexpected new horizons that opened up for many participants.

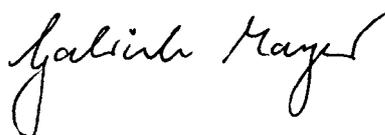
Ulrike Schmidt-Hesse, head of the department for mission and partnership, presents the project "Bibel in gerechter Sprache" (The Bible translated into a just language) – a new Bible translation into German which is drawing a lot of attention and causing a new surge of interest to read the Bible.

Many women repeatedly voice their concern as to how access to the Bible can be opened up to children and adolescents. Five elementary school teachers celebrate an Easter Service with their pupils – examples and prayers were formulated by the children themselves. "In the midst of our anxiety the light is bright because Jesus is risen."

Heloisa Dalferth from Brazil describes how poor women were inspired to take up action on their own – because they link the Bible to their own lives.

In the News from the women's network you will find information on activities and events in Ghana, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea and Germany.

With kind regards from Stuttgart



Gabriele Mayer, Ph.D.
EMS Women and Gender Desk
June 2007



The Holy Scriptures in everyday life

Women's Voices from Nine Countries

We asked women in which way they live with the Bible and what the Bible means to them and received responses from China, Japan, India, Ghana, Indonesia, Korea, Lebanon, Germany and Sudan. Gertrud Hahn and Gabriele Mayer, belonging to the editorial board of OUR VOICES, present the following personal portraits.

INDONESIA

During a HIV/AIDS workshop in Surabaya Andrea Pfeiffer, regional coordinator of the national "Action Campaign against AIDS" received the following answers:

The Bible shows me the right path. When I was around 8 or 9 years old I first hold a Bible in my hand. I read it in Sunday School and later on in family and school. I usually read the Bible in the morning, but there is also possibility in the evening. Normally I read the Bible alone in my personal devotion, but sometimes also with my parents and with my Bible study group once a week. I own my own Bible. And I usually take it along with me when I travel. I use Bibles in two languages, Indonesian and English. I sometimes find the English text clearer. Not only the-

ologians can interpret the Bible. They are also humans who can make a mistake. The Holy Spirit will

guide all believers because it is the promise of God and God never lies. It is very important to pass on Bible stories to younger people. I learn to know my God by reading the Bible and the Holy Spirit helps me to translate it into my life. The Bible gives me a way out of all my problems.

Participant in the HIV/AIDS workshop, teacher



Protestant church in Bali, Indonesia

Photo: EMS/Martina Waibinger

In Dutch India already in 1629 the Gospel according to Matthew was available in Malayan language, in 1668 the complete New Testament and Genesis, in 1701 the Bible in total.

This translation remained valid for a long time. The Indonesian archipelago hosts many peoples with own languages. In the 19th century the Dutch Bible Society sent linguists and thus prepared translations, e.g. in Sumatra and Sulawesi. In 1954 the Indonesian Bible Institute was founded. It published a new Indonesian translation in 1974 which was officially also accepted by the Catholic Church. Bible and parts of the Bible are available today in many regional languages.

Klaus Zöller, former EMS staff

The Bible is a source of inspiration for me. It was the first book that my parents gave me when I started reading. My family was Bible reading twice a day, today I read it only late in the evening. Going on a journey I do not always take my Bible with me, but I always have a daily "bread book". Many contexts of the Bible need to be learnt carefully, particularly the gender perspective. I believe that the Holy Spirit is with us as long as we are sensitive and willing to experience guidance. Some biblical statements seem to be restricting, particularly the Old Testament. I have an impression that Jesus sometimes broke the rule and life has become more human.

Participant in the HIV/AIDS workshop, physician, one child

INDIA 🇮🇳

Prime Sarojini, EMS liaison woman, sent the following answers:

The Bible is daily spiritual bread for me.

When I was five years old, I first hold a Bible in my hand, this was at home, in my family. Reading the Bible today belongs to my daily routine. I have access to different Bible translations. I think this is sometimes helpful because some translations help to gain a better understanding. The Bible helps me to guide my family and the church.

We do not have sufficient learning opportunities and women do not have the same chances.

*Greetha Jayapaul, 42,
responsible for Sunday Schools*

In 1944 the Indian Bible Society was founded in Bangalore. The translation of the Bible has always been and still is the focal point of its work. Approximately half of the Indian women living in the country can neither read nor write. Women from the church are trained as "Bible women" and form groups meeting once a week.

One of the Bible women tells: "First, I just invited my neighbours to listen to cassettes together with me. Many of the women were very moved – and they brought along new guests. We are looking for a shadowy place under a tree, sing together and listen to the words of the Bible!"

www.weltbibelhilfe.de/India



Photo: EMS/Elisabeth Hartmann-Gaiser

Mountains in India

I need the Bible for encouragement. Whenever I need encouragement and guidance of God I read the Bible. Sunday School was the place where I first hold a Bible in my hand. And today I read it in the morning and in the evening. It helps me to overcome problems of our daily life. Quite near our place we have a Bible college with free access for women and men.

*Smt. Beena Murphy Soans, two children,
supporting her husband's ministry in two churches*

KOREA

Kim, Su-Ji, a young Korean woman of the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK), shares:

I am searching for another Bible interpretation.

After my return to Korea I would like to study theology. The reason for this wish was a sermon and Bible interpretation in a Korean church which "surprised" me very much. The sermon told of the story of David and Michal from Old Testament. The biblical teller described how David danced and Michal "laughed at him". During the sermon all women were taught never to laugh at men or else they would be punished. I was not only "surprised" about this kind of in-

Kim Su-Ji is working as an ecumenical volunteer in the Evangelical Church of the Palatinate, Germany



terpretation, but above all about the fact how many women applauded and supported this devaluation. Now I am convinced: I want to work more intensively with Bible texts in order to help not to burden the gender relationship by one-sided Bible interpretation.

CHINA

Meilin Chin, the Executive Associate General Secretary of China Christian Council and lay preacher in Community Church in Shanghai wrote:

For me the Bible is light on my path. I will never leave it lone from me. The first Bible that I was able to read was in 1980 a New Testament with Psalms, when the Bible was reprinted in China by China Christian

Photos: EMS



Young women after morning service

Council after the Cultural Revolution. But I heard verses of the Bible for the first time from my friend during the Cultural Revolution, when there was no Bible available in China. Regularly I read the Bible together with other Christians in my church. Presently, I am doing my D. Min study in a theological seminary of the United States and prefer to read different translations of the Bible.

Through baptism we are all members of the "priesthood of all believers". In China now more and more lay people are playing very important roles in the churches. They preach the gospel and convert people to become Christians. It is very important to share Bible stories with the young generation. In my church we always teach Bible stories to our children with a colourful pictorial Bible published by China Christian Council. I believe that men and women are gifted differently. As a woman I always encourage women to read the Bible with our own eyes. It will be wonderful to share our own views with men from different perspectives.

During the Cultural Revolution the Bible was forbidden in China for a long time. People knowing Bible verses by heart helped that the Bible was not completely buried in oblivion.

Since approx. 1979 the Bible has been admitted once again and the China Christian Council puts a main emphasis on printing Bibles.

JAPAN 

SUGIMORI Yoko, EMS liaison woman, transferred answers from women, who participated in the project "Reading the Bible through the eyes of another":

The Bible is my treasure. I first held a Bible in my hand when I was 10 years old. In Sunday school I learned to read it. Today I read the Bible for myself every evening and in a group every Wednesday. I take my Bible along with me when I attend worships and when I travel. Sometimes I use different translations for better understanding. I think all believers can be evangelists of Christ, not only theologians. Without the Holy Spirit, I cannot understand the Bible. Some passages in the Bible ask a lot, e.g. Luke 6:27: "Love your enemies." But this is the key statement of Christians. It is difficult passing on Bible stories to younger people, but the earlier, the better. Reading the Bible, I have time to ponder on what God wants me to do. The Bible has helped me as a woman to bring up my children.

SHIZUYO Hashimzue, 62, pastor's wife, 4 children, 2 grandchildren



Japanese garden and teahouse – a haven of silence and reflection

Photo: EMS/Lutz Drescher

The Bible is my guiding principle in life. My family members were not Christians. I picked the Bible in order to study English at an English Bible study group at the Lutheran Church in Tokyo. Now I read the Bible daily, in the morning or in the evening, just for myself. I have several different Bibles, in English as well as in Japanese. Some are easier for me to understand.

Mostly women are eager to learn the Bible. When my children were young, I enjoyed looking with them at the illustrated Bible and enjoyed it myself. Women are more concerned about passing on the message to our offsprings.

The Bible helps us not only as women but as people.

HONDA Noriko, 69, works voluntarily for people from abroad, 2 children, 5 grandchildren

Japan has always set a high value on language and scriptures. The Bible played an outstanding role among intellectuals. 1873 the ban on Christianity was lifted. 1880 the Scottish Bible Society published a translation of the New Testament – translated by a team of protestant missionaries and Japanese interpreters.

During World War II Christianity became "the enemies' religion". Since 1950 the Japanese Bible Association has worked for a modern translation. In the seventies/eighties 70 translators, men and women, were participating in a comprehensive revision: Since 1987 the Japanese Interdenominational Bible has been available, a symbol for the ecumenical movement in Japan.

www.bible.or.jp

LEBANON

Wadia Badr, EMS liaison woman and responsible for the women's fellowship "Helping Hand" of the National Evangelical Church in Beirut, NECB, interviewed two women:

The Bible gives me inner strength. I have good knowledge of the New Testament, but do not read it regularly. But I try not to miss Sunday service or Bible studies. In school I learned to read the Bible. I own two Bibles and I use only one translation. Each and every person who has God within is able to glow, give and shine upon others. Not only theologians have the right answer. I believe Holy Spirit is guiding all believers, even if we do not always see it. If some statements in the Bible are confining or restricting? Depends how you take them. The wider the scope, the less restricting. We need an excellent solid structure for passing on Bible stories to younger people. In our country men and women have the same access to theological learning opportunities.

Zeenalee Ayub, 44, graphic and interior designer

During the last decades the liberal and multi-religious metropolis of Beirut offered the necessary freedom for various projects in the Middle East. General Secretary Mike Bassous and his team "Running for Bibles" take part in the annual International Beirut Marathon.

The Bible Society participates in the programme of Christian TV and radio stations in the Middle East and organizes events for adolescents and interested people from the neighbourhood of Christian churches.

www.weltbibelhilfe.de



Photo: EMS/Martina Waiblinger

The Bible is my closest friend. My relationship with the Bible is very important. I learnt to read the Bible in school. Today I read the Bible daily, in the morning and in the evening, alone and in a group. I have my own Bible and I take it with me wherever I go. I learn many verses by heart and mark every thing I like. I have no other translation, I stick to my own Bible only. The Holy Spirit guides every sincere believer in his or her life. It is very important to teach the younger people specially the Sunday School children. The Bible gives strength to my life.

Leila Nseir, 75, five daughters, collaborating in Sunday School

Beach near Beirut

GHANA 

Rebecca Dowuona, EMS liaison woman in Accra, sent the following responses:

I read the Bible to know more about God. I am a Bible believing Christian. I know the Bible from my childhood and learnt Bible reading in school. I read the Bible every day, but also in church, in the women's fellowship group and in the Children's Service. I have an own Bible and take it along, even when I am travelling. I have another Bible in English, it helps me to understand and explain it to others.

The statements in the Bible are not confining, but they withhold me from doing evil. It is good to pass the Bible stories on to the younger people to draw them to God. Women and men have the same opportunities in learning. As a woman the Bible helps me to obey and humble myself.

Dora Ogboo Mensah, 52, seamstress, three children, church elder, children's service teacher



Photo: EMS/Steffen Grashoff

Women during a service in Ghana

Most of the Christians in Ghana, women and men, cannot think of the beginning of their day without the Bible. In local languages the Bible is hold dear because it played a major role for the development of literary language.

Bible translators such as Johann Gottlieb Christaller and Johannes Zimmermann from early missionary times in Ghana are still well remembered (please refer to page 11).

Bernhard Dinkelaker, EMS

I read the Bible to experience guidance in my life. It strengthens my faith as a woman. I am a Bible believing Christian who takes every word of the Bible seriously. I learnt to read it in school and church. I am a lay woman reading Scripture during worship. I own a Bible and take notes and mark my Bible as I study. All believers belong to the "priesthood" and can give the right answers. It is a must that the Holy Spirit should guide all believers. The statements of the Bible are restricting if you are not doing the right thing.

Cecilia Ashiokai Dowuona, 52, school secretary, five children

SUDAN

The following answer was sent by the women's fellowship of PCOS Sudan:

I cannot imagine living without the Bible. The Bible is my regular companion. I received the Bible when I was baptized. I could go to school for two years. When I married, going to church was over – for 25 years. Only then I broke with my husband. I shared the fate of beaten women between home and jail. Every morning around 5 o'clock I read the Bible – I am proud to possess one of my own. In the family we read the Bible together on Sundays and in times of anxiety, distress and difficulties. It is a comfort to me.

Member in the women's fellowship of PCOS, four children.



Photo: EMS/Nicola Biber

Women in Sudan reading jointly the Bible.

GERMANY

Bärbel Wuthe, staff at EMS Women and Gender Desk, spoke with women from her congregation:



Photo: EMS/Jürgen Wuthe

Rural countryside in Wuerttemberg

The Bible is a reference book for me which I flip open to look for God's response to concrete questions. Only since September 2004 the Bible has consciously become part of my daily life. In the morning I read the Bible alone, once a week in a house fellowship. In the beginning I marked important passages, since January 2007 I have been keeping a Bible-reading diary. Some statements of the Bible are confining or restricting for us, but the time has to be taken into consideration in which these texts were written down. The Bible helps me as a person, as a sister – "as a woman"? That is irrelevant for me.

Cornelia Heinze, 51, physician assistant, married, one daughter

The Bible is God's "conversation" with me. I learned reading the Bible in the girls' group, the staff meeting at church and in our house fellowship. I do not read according to a special plan or at a special time but when my "heart" tells me. My Bible is very "coloured" because I mark passages. I have already read several translations but I always get back to my "old" Lutheran translation. At first sight some statements of the Bible seem to be restricting but when I engage in it God gives more than God takes. For me the Bible is God's conversation with me, his guidance for my life and also part of his love and affection for me.

Renate Lenz, 53, secretary at the rectory, married, two daughters

The first translation into a Germanic language represents the Gothic Bible from the fourth century, some parts are still available. In 1522 Martin Luther translated the New Testament, 1534 followed the Old Testament. The speciality about this translation: in addition to linguistic accuracy it should be understandable for everybody. Luther's motto was "looking at the crowd's mouth".

Due to the simultaneously developing art of printing Bibles could be manufactured in larger quantities. The influence on German high level language cannot be overvalued.

Gabriele Mayer, EMS

The Bible as a daily companion

No stories of the past

In Ghana I grew up with the Bible as part of a normal life of the family. I enjoyed the simple Bible stories been told by my parents, and also the memorising of Bible verses.

Atending Sunday School, was for me a great pleasure. Hearing the stories a second time enabled me to ask more questions for a better understanding. My parents encouraged us to read the Bible and so it was not surprising that I became a Sunday School teacher from a very tender age, a duty I cherish till today.

I spent a greater part of my education life in Mission schools where Bible reading, morning and evening devotions, and Sunday church services formed the normal school routine.

In my youthful days I enjoyed attending scripture unions, also called Christian fellowship, organised in schools and also during the holidays by the youth and students in towns and villages. Those experiences with the Bible form a greater part of my life today. I read my Bible in the morning before getting out of bed and before going to bed. I read it in all situations for encouragement, comfort, guidance and also to enable me to understand God's promises in my life. I try to get the Bible to speak to me directly and personally by not taking the stories as stories of the past.

I have and also read Bibles in different languages and in different versions. This gives me a better understanding. I also enjoy reading commentaries on the Bible, not because I am a minister but because I wish to understand the background stories.

I believe in the words of the Bible as the truth because of my personal experiences. I therefore do not waste time arguing and looking for authenticity of the stories, but rather try to find out how I can live my life by the Bible. I feel the Holy Spirit's presence in my life since most the time my morning devotions reflect a current situation in which I find myself and I am being encouraged that God cares and so I keep trusting.

References of women in the Bible, the Bible saying we are all priests (1 Peter 2: 9) and also my positive experiences with the Bible make me convinced that women are



Elisabeth Aduama

It's a long way to travel on foot in Ghana

Photo: EMS/Steffen Grashoff

a part of God's resurrection plan and we do not have to wait only for men or theologians.

I cherish the Bible as a part of my wealth and a partner who never fails and therefore when very good human friends fail me, I always find consolation in the words of my Bible.

Elisabeth Aduama is a pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Ghana. For three years she has been working as ecumenical co-worker in the Palatinate, Germany.

The Word of God from Surabaya in Indonesia to Tema in Ghana?

Observations and questions on women's Bible reading practice in nine countries

The spectrum of experience and attitudes is quite broad – no wonder coming from so many differing backgrounds such as Indonesia and Ghana, or Germany and Lebanon. Are similar reading methods visible and how do we differ in our approach to the Bible?

Where can we learn from each other?

(please refer to page 4-10)

READING THE BIBLE WITH OTHERS

Numerous women report that they regularly read the Bible with others in groups. We can only speculate to what extent these Bible texts are discussed and argued about from contrasting or even opposing points of view. Church traditions seem to be diverging from each other.

EVERYBODY IS ASKED – STATUS PLAYS A SUBORDINATE ROLE

Almost all women specifically support the idea of the so called "priesthood of all believers" according to Luther which means that every Christian, women and men, can count on the Holy Spirit and is not reliant on the mediation or authority of selected people. Luther himself characterized one of his translation criteria as "looking at the crowd's mouth". He tried to translate in a language which people could understand using their vocabulary and experiences.

WANTING TO UNDERSTAND BIBLE TEXTS

Many of the women's comments showed a search for comprehensibil-



Photo: EMS/Birte Petersen

Studying the Bible within the Bible group of Shitaya Church in Japan

ity, for education and the means to understand difficult texts in our time. At this point approaches diverge widely. One woman writes: "I am a Bible-believing Christian who takes every word of the Bible seriously." While another woman points out: "We have to consider the time in which the Bible texts were written". The question behind all this, namely with which "glasses" the Bible is read and linked with one's own life is discussed in the contribution on page 14/15.

THE BIBLE AS DAILY BREAD

The main point made in the feedback reports is to be found in the testimony of how important the Bible is for these women. Vital statements

such as: "has changed my life; the older the more valuable, a friend for life, God's conversation with me, against the background of problems my treasure, my light and strength for my life, daily bread..." – these are strong pictures: these women's lives and their daily routine cannot be comprehended without the Bible.

FREEDOM FOR PERSONAL BIBLE READING

The common factor for many women is the personal devotion practised by reading the Bible. Against the background of a very busy daily routine with manifold duties and responsibilities these Christian women take time for themselves and thus enjoy a

privilege. Here they find an interruption in their commitment for others; here they set limits and do not allow themselves to be at the non-stop call of others.

Was this not an early demand of the feminist movement that women need and claim space for themselves? This is put into practice here in daily life. Simultaneously, in this free space it is possible for women to gather strength and encouragement for their daily lives.

THE BIBLE SETS IN MOTION

What does reading the Bible move and inspire women to do? One woman writes: "The Bible helps me as a woman to be obedient and humble." Another woman on the other hand feels: "I am proud of the priesthood of all believers and that I too can contribute to shaping and changing the church." This comes from an HIV/AIDS activist in a church community where this subject is generally taboo!

Many women have the common wish to open the way to faith and the Bible for the next generation. One woman specifically mentions: "The Bible has helped me to bring up my children."

THE BIBLE AND GENDER RELATIONS

It is astonishing how the subject of gender relations was dealt with by the women in their responses. Some women observe that there are clear differences in the behaviour of women and men (e.g. their willingness to learn or the wish to forward faith on to the next generation). Others warn cautiousness as "some statements in the Bible must be carefully examined, especially statements on men and women." Some find encouragement to obedience while others to working actively to change the church.

These answers reflect the different assessments of gender relations. Questionable, however, seem to be statements on equal chances in churches where it is still not natural for women to hold leading positions in their congregations.

Possibly this inequality in gender relations is not noticed during personal Bible reading.

How and when will the relationship be discernible between certain ways of reading and interpreting the Bible and the maintaining of unjust structures especially in churches?

How can the connection between the history of certain bible texts and excluding church practice become clear and – inspire to protestant action?

*Gabriele Mayer, PhD,
EMS Women and Gender Desk*



Photo: Ernst-Ludwig Vatter



Photo: EMS/Elisabeth Hartmann-Gaiser

UNEXPECTED NEW HORIZONS OPEN UP

The international EMS project has yielded fruit

Within the frame of the project "Reading the Bible through the eyes of Another" Bible study groups were invited worldwide to relate their life experience to the biblical word and share their authentic reflections with each other. More than 80 groups from various countries participated in this process. From the very outset this meant: embarking into an exciting journey. It was a journey of learning with surprising places where learning might take place and discovering of astounding treasures. The following observations were made during the International Workshop in Tauberbischofsheim in October 2006.

ROLE PLAY AS A POSSIBILITY OF INTERCULTURAL LEARNING

During the Bible Sharing (described on page 17) we had read about the encounter of Jesus and the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7: 24-30).

From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go – the demon has left your daughter." So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

After this, each group was asked to prepare a role play for all participants. The role of Jesus was variably occupied and interpreted: by men and women, first being simply tired, apathetic and worn out, then arrogant or repelling. The same with the Syrophenician woman: first she was provoking, then kindly asking or crying desperately. Remarkably, her role was never occupied by a male participant. Each version made the corresponding context of the players visible. Thus the Korean version showed Jesus as a kind of elder counsellor, in the Indian version Jesus rejected the woman as "untouchable", as a Dalit woman. The international composition of the workshop and the manifold perspectives became obvious.

STEPS FOR REFLECTING THE ROLE PLAY:

- presenting the role plays in plenary
- audience is describing, not interpreting what they have noticed



- distinguishing inside and outside perspective in its variety, hearing and perceiving audience and players
- grasping one's own context - understanding the other's context better
- discerning the other perspective to one's own context
- taking over positive results, modifying the own attitude

In their different interpretations of this story exchanged in writing before the workshop, Germans mostly emphasised the braveness of the woman, Ghanaians e.g. appraised her humbleness instead:

"The woman does not give in at once

right: The encounter of Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman, played by Juliana Odjoh-Darko from Tema, Ghana and Reena Christable from South India.

below: Multi-perspective communication becomes easier with interactive games.



Photos: EMS/Bernhard Dinkelaker

when Jesus offends her but remains persistent, is quick at repartee and argues with Jesus."

"... she humbled herself in the face of total rejection and humiliation."

During the international workshop the following process took place in one of the role plays:

- Jesus is played by a German man, the woman by a Ghanaian woman
- Jesus loafs about on a chair. Apparently he is asleep. The woman approaches him on her knees. He turns around slowly but finally agrees to heal her daughter.
- Some of the beholders feel, the woman acted too humble by falling on her knees. The actor herself says it was just an instrument for her to achieve her goal, a way of being polite.

- The Germans' context is characterised by a longing for woman empowerment and gender justice, whereas for the Ghanaian context it is important to respect the traditional rules and act according to them in order to achieve her goal.

- For both, the goal of getting the daughter healed, was most important but the means were different.

WHAT COULD THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE BE HERE?

For the Ghanaian actor the new challenge could be to balance respect for society rules and the own self-esteem. For other beholders it was new that humbleness must not necessarily go along with low self-esteem or sense of inferiority but that it might just be polite. The challenge for German ears could be to rethink the connotation of humbleness with submissiveness. Finally man or woman can only be humble, when he or she is simultaneously courageous.

Cornelia Hole, student of theology and member of EMS youth network

Does the Bible need a just language?

Reading the Bible with eyes for others

In October 2006 a new Bible translation was presented in Frankfurt am Main, Germany: "Bibel in gerechter Sprache" (Bible in a just language). This publication provoked lively discussions.

Since then many men and women have read the new translation and compared the texts with other translations. They have made new discoveries in old texts and have entered into discussions on what these texts tell them – us – today.

Reactions from some women from the Evangelical Church in the Palatinate:

- "Who comes to church services? Mainly women. And many have waited for this translation."
- "I would really love to pray using one or other of the psalms in the new translation during the service. It's a pity that we only have the Lutheran translation in our song book."
 - "You, Lord, are our father and mother in heaven' – I have no problem saying that."

Reaction from a women's group in Wuerttemberg:

I introduced the Bible in a just language to our women's group. We must read and learn more about it before we can judge. I think it's a pity that the translation is so heavily criticised. In our adults' group we will compare the new translation with three others. Thanks to our deacon we are already used to the formulation "the fatherly and motherly God may bless you and protect you" and we find the femininity in God very beautiful.

ULRIKE SCHMIDT-HESSE PONDERES

The Bible has again become a topic of conversation. The discussions are lively and criticism is sometimes very severe.

What is meant by "a just language"? More than 50 male and female theologians who have translated the texts list the following criteria:

- Just with regard to the text
- Just with regard to gender relationships
- Just with regard to today's dialogue with Jews
- Just with regard to social context

Just with regard to the text means that translations were made from the original biblical languages, Hebrew and Greek, into German. The proper name of God was not translated as it is written in the Old Testament with the four consonants j-h-w-h- (the tetragram), but it is not voiced. To

sanctify the name of God, it is read as "Adonaj", for example. In many German Bible translations "Adonaj" is translated by the German "Herr" (Sir or Lord). Adonaj, however, only means God and is not simultaneously a polite form of address for men as in German. In the Bible in just language other ways of reading God's name are proposed besides "Adonaj": "the Eternal", "the Name", "GOD", "the Living One", "YOU", "the Holy One" (male and female form). In this way authors also want to express that God is beyond gender polarisation (refer to Genesis 1:26-28, Deuteronomy 4: 16, Hosea 11,9).

Just with regard to gender relationships means that women in the Bible and their roles are clearly named. Romans 16:1 in the Bible in a just language is translated with: "I want to introduce to you our sister

Phoebe, deacon in the congregation of Kenchreae.... She is an authority and has offered protection for many, including myself." The Greek text says "diakonos". In previous translations it was mostly translated by "servant", in other verses, however, – where men were concerned – the same word was translated with deacon.

In the following verses Paul conveys greetings to two persons named Andronikus and Junias according to Luther's translation, "...famous among apostles". Investigations have shown that the name of Junias did not exist in the ancient world, the name of Junia however was frequent. By writing the male form of the name the existence of a female apostle was generally lost. The list of greetings mentions several women in the congregation of Rome who have performed special duties and services.

Their work is named as "very hard work". Paul uses the same Greek verb reporting about his own missionary work. This shows that women were actively participating in congregational and missionary work.

Just with regard to today's dialogue between male and female Jews means making fruitful use of new findings from the Christian-Jewish dialogue in the translation. One example is the translation of the so-called antitheses in the Sermon on the Mount. In previous translations it says: "Ich aber sage euch" ("but verily, verily I say unto you"). This German "but" was often understood as if Jesus was turning against the Jewish tradition. It is however a formula used by rabbis. This is why the Bible in just language translates: "Today I say it this way."

Just language also means clearly describing the very often harsh social reality described in biblical stories. This is why the parable of the workers in the vineyard in Matthew 20 speaks of unemployed people who are hired for one day or for several hours and not of persons standing idly on the market.

The translation wants to express that biblical texts relate about people who are strengthened by God in their struggle for justice and freedom.

"The blind recover their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, the poor bring the good news." This is the new translation in Matthew 11:5. In previous texts the translation was: "the poor are preached the good news". The grammar and the literary context favour this new version of the text. It becomes clear that poor people in the New Testament are not only people who received the good news and labour of love, but are also subjects of the good news.

In groups and services I experience that this new translation makes the character of the Bible clearer for many people and that biblical texts speak to us with new meaning. It is true that texts are becoming "understandable in their strangeness and challenging in their closeness, new as close acquaintances and challenging in their strangeness" as is said in the introduction to the Bible in a just language.



Photo: EMS/Steffen Grashoff

More than 70 different translations of the Bible are available in Germany today.

There are passages in the new translation which do not convince me. There are texts that mean a lot to me in the Lutheran translation and which I shall always prefer to read in the familiar translation. It is very interesting to compare the new version with the old one in biblical groups and also during the preparation of a sermon. The glossary in the Bible in a just language gives explanations for many important biblical expressions and is very helpful. It convinces me that the translation does not intend to be the one and only, but invites the reader to provide a personal critical reading.



Photo: EMS/Bernhard Dinkelaker

Different Bible translations can be compared within the group.



The Bible in a just language was published in October 2006.

More than 50 theologians, men and women, newly translated the Bible into German.

Whoever translates a text must continuously decide in favour of greater closeness to the original text or better understanding in a different context. This is why there is no neutral translation. The important thing is to make one's premises and criteria transparent. This is exactly what the Bible in a just language does.

I wish that the new translation and the discussion around it will help the Bible to proclaim the good news of salvation and life, of justice and peace for many people and that they – or more precisely we – will be strengthened to become witnesses.

Ulrike Schmidt-Hesse, head of department for "Mission and Partnership" and EMS vice-general secretary

Bible sharing

A group method from South Africa

Bible Sharing is a method to study the Bible which offers the possibility for each individual member of the group to participate actively and to express in freedom in which way the Bible text speaks to him or her.

A possible procedure during the Bible Sharing:

1. Step: Prayer

One member of the group speaks an opening prayer, free or using a standard prayer. A religious or spiritual song can also be chosen.

2. Step: Reading the Bible text

All participants receive the same Bible text. One person is reading the text aloud once or twice. A time of deep silence follows (about 3 to 5 minutes).

3. Step: Impressions

Participants are asked to pronounce loudly one sentence, one word or part of a sentence from the Bible text which spoke to him or her in a special way. There is no time pressure, but short periods of silence between individual contributions.

4. Step: Silence

The group facilitator sets a time of silence (3-5 minutes) in order to avoid possible disquietness (e.g. looking at the watch). During this period of time the biblical text and impulses by the words spoken can continue to have an effect. Participants can open themselves for God's Word in meditation.

5. Step: Sharing, listening to each other

Participants are sharing their impressions. They tell each other which sentence or phrase touched them especially and why. They also express negative feelings. A conversation comes up. Information on the context of the biblical text can be given now. The group facilitator can give impulses as guidelines by asking special questions, e.g.:

- Where does the text speak to us, where do we respond?
- Where does it give me/us strength and where does it rub something?
- What do we know about the biblical context at that time?
- Which vision of peace does the text bring us for our situation?
- What does the text mean to our group with regard to our own experiences with absence of peace/discord?

- What does motivate me/us to act and get involved with peace?

It is important not to lead a discussion on theologically "right" or "wrong". The aim is moreover to find out how biblical texts speak to us. With regard to the project the aim is to listen to each other beyond boundaries and to learn from each other.

6. Step: Closing prayer

The Bible Sharing is closed with a prayer or song.



Participants in the youth workshop in Ghana studying the Bible

Photo: EMS/Simon Traut

In the midst of our anxiety a light shines because Jesus is risen

Teachers plan an Easter service with their pupils

Shortly before the Easter holidays, the teachers' team reflect on how they can bring the passion of Jesus and Easter close to the seven year olds to bridge between the children's world and the texts of the Gospel according to John.

Together with the children they gather their experiences and write the prayers. During the service the second class pupils tell the biblical story.

They prepared this service for the "younger ones", i.e. for the five first classes at the "Freie Evangelische Schule" in Reutlingen, Germany.

In the middle of the room thick grey stones are piled on top of each other.

1. The children sing a hymn and welcome each other.

2. Heavy stones in life.

Some pupils point to the big stone pile and say: In my life there are sometimes things as dark and hard as a stone...

■... when my father and mother quarrel and hit each other

■... when my pet died.

■... because my friend is moving away and we can no longer see each other.

3. Then the children continue:
At Easter it was the same: so many things were very sad and hard to bear. But then something new happened. Listen to the story of Easter:

Biblical story (according to John 11/12, 19/20)

*You have already heard a lot about Jesus.
He helped many people.
Blind people could see again.
Hungry people had enough to eat.
Sad people were happy again.
He told the people about God.
He showed them how much God loves us humans.
People loved to listen to him. They trusted in him.
They said: Jesus, God sent you to us.*

*Many men in the government thought differently:
What shall we do when all people listen to Jesus and no longer to us?
He speaks wrongly about God. The best thing would be for him to die.
So they arrested Jesus. They wanted to kill him.*

*But Jesus had done no wrong!
He was the Son of God!
In spite of this he allowed the people to arrest and kill him. Jesus died on the cross.*

Then his friends came. They were very sad. They laid Jesus into a cave-like grave.

*They said to each other:
We could not save Jesus. That hurts so much.
Everything they experienced felt like a heavy burden, like a heavy stone on them.*

*But stop! Have you forgotten?
Jesus is the Son of God!
Death has no power over him!*

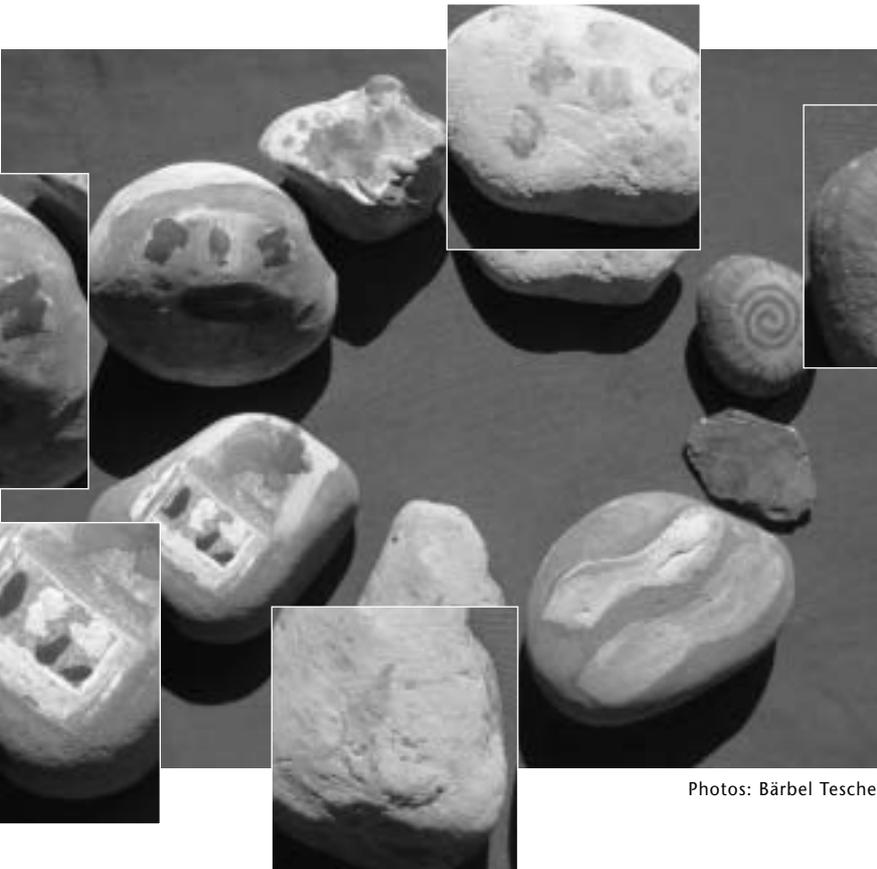
*And this is what happened: After three days Jesus rose from the dead.
He was no longer in the grave.*

*He came back to life!
Jesus overwhelmed death.
Death could not hold him back.
Jesus visited his friends.
First they were shocked.
But gradually they were able to believe it.
Jesus is alive! He has not left us alone.
He loves us. We can trust in him.*

4. In a dialogue children ask questions about this story and talk about their lives: Standing beside the pile of stones, they ask:

"But how is it in our lives? Do we perhaps also experience something like a small resurrection? When something which was dark and heavy like a stone becomes bright and light and we feel alive again?"





Photos: Bärbel Tesche

left: Stones painted with bright colours become "Easter remembrance stones".

below: Pupils saying their prayers.



"Yes, that's sometimes the case, e.g. when I quarrel with my friend and then we make it up again. Then the light is bright between the stones."

One child puts a candle between the stones.

"When parents separate it hurts a lot and is very sad. But then after a time you realise that life goes on and is still good to you and your heart becomes lighter again."

One child puts a vase of budding branches between the stones.

"When I do not understand something in school and my teacher explains it again to me and all of a sudden – I understand quite well."

5. The children sing a song of resurrection and invite the younger ones to paint the stones.

"Look at my stone. I have painted one side of it. With bright and gaudy colours. Now it is an Easter remembrance stone".

An Easter remembrance stone?

"Yes, just like at Easter. In the midst of darkness, quarrels and anxiety it became light. Because Jesus arose from the dead".

6. During the prayer children tell about their worries and hopes:

"Dear God, sometimes life is not kind when Mum and Dad quarrel, when my pet died and sometimes feeling afraid at school. It is good that you know about this.

You make my life brighter again. I can trust you. Dear God, sometimes I feel lonely.

I need someone who can listen to me and love me. Then I need you! You love me. Amen"

7. In all the classrooms colourful stones are painted and laid out together in a big Easter pattern which accompanies the children during the Easter season.

Anne Baur, Gabi Bürkle, Bärbel Tesche, Hildegard Walker, Gabi Zwissler-Schmid

What has a patchwork quilt to do with the Bible?

Women in Brazil link their lives to the Bible

Photo: EMS/Heloisa Dalferth



A warming quilt sewn from colourful pieces of cloth as a gesture of solidarity.

In order to apply this method of reading the Bible in other contexts it makes sense to look at concrete situations. For example the gathering of women from a "favela", a slum area in Brazil. They introduce and talk about their own stories when studying a Bible text.

One example from Santa Cruz:

A group of poor women sew pieces of cloth together. The result is a patchwork quilt.

Maura is one of the women. Her child is taking part in the street childrens' project "Joy and Hope", a social project of the Paróquia Evangélica Santa Cruz. Maura perceives the connection between her sewing, reading the Bible and her life:

"Each piece of cloth of this quilt is like a verse of the Bible. I'm not very good at reading. But there are verses in the Bible, aren't there? You always speak of chapters, verses and texts."

The text is this story and the story consists of pieces belonging together. And each piece of the text is as important as each piece of the cloth. Otherwise our quilt would have a hole. Only women do such work. Men would never do this – even if their children are freezing cold, and they themselves too."

Such an approach to the Bible can be described in three steps:

Most poor people start with their own lives and situations which they have to cope with. That is their starting point when reading the Bible.

They then hear about the context of the Bible text at the time it was written and the group leader makes some comments on the text.

At the end of the afternoon, when the pieces of cloth have been turned into a warm quilt, the women give the quilt to a pregnant and impover-

"Leitura Popular da Bíblia" is a Latin-American way of reading the Bible under the special perspective of liberation theology. Simultaneously, it is a feminist way of reading the Bible. In this way, a Brazilian or Latin-American approach to Bible texts is possible. Challenges in people's daily life struggles and the search for alternatives in life are linked with Bible texts and interpret each other mutually.

The biggest challenge of the "basis" community is not to interpret the Bible but to interpret life with the help of the Bible.

Carlos Mesters

ished girl as a present. The quilt sewn by all the women together becomes a joint gesture of solidarity.

Rev. Heloisa Dalferth from Santa Cruz do Sul, South Brazil, now living in Lichtenstein-Holzelfingen, Wuerttemberg. She is a member of the EMS Women's Advisory Board.

News from the EMS women's network

Excerpts from reports of EMS partner churches' liaison women

Ghana

Rebecca Dowuona, liaison woman in Ghana reports:

"The Presbyterian Church of Ghana has a dual purpose in ministry, the spiritual dimension and the material dimension:

- The spiritual dimension helps to meet the spiritual needs of the flock and build the church as Jesus commissioned the disciples in Matt 28:18-20
- The material dimension helps the members to improve and have quality of life of members and community as it is recorded in John 10:10 "I have come that you might have life in fullness".

With this knowledge the Women's fellowship which has been in existence for about forty seven years now offers different events: Leadership Course, National Delegates Conference, Central Women's Ministry Meeting. Apart from these activities, the women have other activities such as Bible Studies. This year's study is on the books of Titus and Philemon. The Outreach programmes such as the visitation to the Hospitals, Orphanage Homes, Prisons, and Psychiatry Hospitals are well patronized...

The World Day of Prayer activities were formerly performed by the women all alone but now it is the general church activity."



India

Prime Sarojini, liaison woman in India, reports:

"Church of South India Women's Fellowship has launched out a programme called "Family Enrichment Programme". This programme is conducted at regional level inviting delegates from 22 Dioceses of C.S.I. The subjects included are Gender Sensitization, Health & Hygiene, Family Counselling, Purpose of Marriage, Communication and Conflict Management. Responsibilities and Relationships, and Personality Development. We have conducted these meetings for Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Kerala regions.

The Church of South India Women's Fellowship is going to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee during the month of May 2007."



Japan

SUGIMORI Yoko, liaison woman in Japan reports from the women's fellowship of the United Church of Christ in Japan:

"In March we have had World Day of Prayer (WDP) with the worship order from Paraguay on the basis of a translation into Japanese from English materials realized by ourselves.

During the same time the translation workshop for 2007 WDP started. A women's group was actively involved in the EMS Bible Reading Project "Reading the Bible through the eyes of another" to promote ecumenical relations with churchwomen in the world.

We decided to continue the same theme as 2004-2006, "Carrying on Tomorrow's Mission as a Part of the Body of Christ-Studying the Matthews" by adding an important issue "Praying and seeking Peace in the world".

In 2009 we will celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the women's fellowship with 1700 churchwomen inviting global ecumenical guests from our partner churches. Please continue to pray for us, as Christians in a very minority situation in our society."



Korea

Chae Hae Won, liaison woman in Korea reports about her new task:

Quite recently she started her work at the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) for the Ecumenical Consortium for Peace Building and Social Development on the Korean Peninsula which was founded on December 8, 2006 in Hong Kong with participants representing churches and ecumenical bodies around the world.

The Ecumenical Consortium aims to:

- strengthen information-sharing within the ecumenical community and promote ecumenical participation in the peace and reconciliation movement in the Korean peninsula as well as in North-East Asia
- encourage the ecumenical community around the world to share their resources
- mobilize the limited resources of the ecumenical community in a more systematic and effective way (ensuring mutual transparency and accountability) to support

social development in the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea = North Korea)

- seek the possibility to work with any other organization in DPRK to promote sustainable projects and assist the DPRK to build its own capacity for sustainable and alternative social development
- support the Christian community in North Korea to make its life more visible in that society.

Congratulations for Chae Hae Won and the Lord's blessings for her responsible task!



Indonesia

40 Years Women's Fellowship in Toraja Church.
Excerpts from the report of Aleksander Mangoting, member of the office for information and communication of Toraja Church:

"Women in Toraja Church embody a special potential. "If women today are treated differently than men, this means injustice produced by the society", says the general secretary of the women's ministry in Indonesia, Mrs Dra Hj Andi Kasmawati Paturusi during the 40 anniversary celebrations of the women's fellowship of Toraja Church on December 4th, 2006 in Rantepao.

The women of Toraja Church are expected to sharpen the face of the church within society, to form the character of young people by culture and religion, to shape the role of women in society as they are the first and most important educators. The president, Rev. D. M. Anggui, S. Th. could present within the frame of the celebrations a book of remembrance which might become a reference book for the further ministry of the women's fellowship. Furthermore, a panel discussion took place on the role of women in politics. This topic came up for the first time in the history of Indonesian churches (PGI church association).

Elisabeth P., member of the Toraja Church, said that she only now understood the true meaning of politics which formerly she only judged as dirty business. Therefore it is good to become politically active as women according to the Word of God. ...

"RBM is a programme paying special attention to disabled children. It was the result of the 8th women's conference of Toraja Church in 1992. By the end of 2006 almost 400 people were cared for. Manifold kinds of work with disabled people are practised today. "



Excerpts from reports of EMS member churches

Germany

Evangelical Church of the Palatinate

Barbara Kohlstruck reports among other things:

"Ecumenism: On the occasion of a Ghana delegation's visit in late summer 2007 we offer two events for women:

- June 2007 "Women living in the globalised world" with women from Ghana living in Germany
- September 2007 "How do I live with my faith" (Working with Bible texts)"

Mission Association of the Moravian Church in Germany, Renate Stierlen reports among other things:

Double jubilee 2007:

This year the Moravian Church remembers the 550. Jubilee of their foundation day in spring 1457. The Moravian Church remembers the first missionaries being sent to the slaves on the Caribbean Island of St. Thomas by Zinzendorf 275 years ago. Several events are planned.

Since March 2007 a new collaborating family (Sebastian and Annette Schneider with their small daughter) have

again been living and working in the rehabilitation centre on Sternberg in Palestine.

The difficult political circumstances and the risks on the way to the centre made it necessary already years ago to transfer part of the activities to the surrounding villages. There the disabled children live again with their families, join local kindergartens and schools and are regularly visited and cared for by the co-workers of the centre. The commitment with which the weakest of society are supported here is astounding.

Evangelical Women in Wuerttemberg, Karin Lindner reports:

Ecumenical Women's Congress in Stuttgart:

On October 20th, 2007 two thousand women from ACK-churches (Working Committee of Christian Churches) in Baden-Wuerttemberg are expected in "Liederhalle" in Stuttgart. The motto is: "Life in Fullness – Women taking action and shaping the future".

The correspondence course for feminist theology is carried out for the second time. Numerous events are offered with regard to the new Bible translation "Bible in a just language".

Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau, Kristin Flach-Köhler wrote:

- Annual topic 2006/07 "Women – Body – Faith" Jubilee on September 1st, 2007: 100 years Evangelical women in the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau under the motto of "Fresh Winds and Strong Sails – Evangelical Women on a favourable course".
- Five workshops on World Day of Prayer were fully booked.
- Correspondence course for feminist theology will be offered in 2008/09.

The editorial staff of OUR VOICES is looking forward to your comments!

News from the EMS Secretariat in Stuttgart, Germany

Ulrike Schmidt-Hesse, new head of department and vice general secretary introduces herself:



Photo: EMS Steffen Grashoff

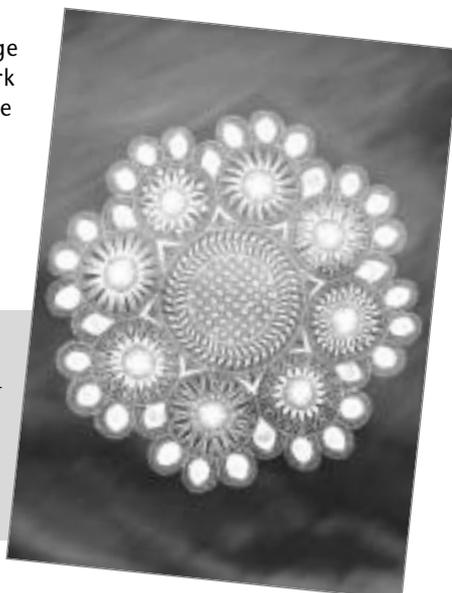
Interview with Ulrike Schmidt-Hesse

"For more than a year now I have been head of the department "Mission and Partnership" and vice general secretary of EMS. Before I came to Stuttgart, I worked as the director of studies at the Zentrum Ökumene (Centre for Ecumenism) in the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau in Frankfurt on Main. I am a pastor and 50 years old. My husband is a pastor as well. He works 50% part-time in a congregation and in our family he is responsible for the largest part of the housework. Our daughter is fifteen years old.

The stories of hope in the Bible are essential for my faith and my life. I love to talk about them with and in groups of women and men from different life styles, churches and cultures.

I am looking forward to the exchange with you within the women's network and hope that we will soon have the opportunity to meet personally."

María Victoria Servin,
United under God's tent
 © Weltgebetstag der Frauen –
 Deutsches Komitee e.V.



Adoption of gender guidelines as a cross-cutting perspective in EMS, Gabriele Mayer reports:

As an ecumenical fellowship of Christians, women and men, we believe that God created all people with equal rights. We have to admit, however, that we are often far away from our convictions as far as gender, HIV/AIDS and corruption is concerned.

Men and women are on their way towards a just fellowship – and some important steps have already been taken.

The way has led from gender training courses in Lebanon, Indonesia, Basle and Stuttgart to a broad discussion process in many partner and member churches. Numerous responses to the draft of the gender guidelines were presented to the Mission Council when in November 2006 the new guidelines ("Gender Policy") were adopted and its implementation agreed upon by the Mission Council.

In eight chosen fields of action step-by-step changes shall be put into practice during the next three years – by training, analysis, exact target definition, implementation and evaluation.

In EMS, the unit responsible for media and communication early on established a very concrete list concerning how in the future clichés about men and women can be interrupted both in language and images, and how women will no longer be made invisible by male-dominated language, but become visible as own subjects and in which way both men and women become visible and audible in their diversity and dignity; even where injustice and misery seem to keep them powerless. A gender-just language can contribute to justice when carefully applied.

Bärbel Wuthe, staff member at the EMS Women and Gender Desk, reports:

The World Day of Prayer with the worship order from Paraguay was also celebrated in the EMS Secretariat. The worldwide relationship with all Christians in member and partner churches becomes especially tangible on this occasion. The Nandutí-lace which was chosen by the women from Paraguay as this year's symbol stands for "Unity in Variety". The staff of the Secretariat are also striving towards being "united under God's tent".

The Liaison Women of the International Women's Networking



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PHOTO ON FRONT PAGE: India, EMS/Lutz Drescher

THY WORD IS A LAMP
TO GUIDE MY FEET
AND A LIGHT
ON MY PATH

PSALM 119, 105



Association of Churches and Missions
in South Western Germany