

New quinquennium new beginnings

We are starting a new series in which each newsletter we will focus on one of our unions. We have asked all of you to participate and in this issue we are presenting three countries: the **Swedish Union Conference**, **Cyprus Section** and **Greek Mission**. We hope this will help you with new ideas and motivate you. We look forward to each issue.

Sonja Kalmbach has been part of the national Women's Ministries work since 2013. In the beginning of 2014 she was officially elected WM director in Sweden - taking over from their male WM director (probably the world's only male WM director) Daniel.

The biggest challenge of her work is to culturally adapt WM to a country which is among the leading countries of the world concerning gender equality.



Some of the focus areas that are important in other countries (education, giving girls and women the possibility to become a leader, making it possible for women to serve in the church etc.) are not as relevant there in Sweden, since these are areas everybody there takes for granted. But many things are much more relevant than women and men are aware of.

The biggest joy of her work is to see women grow. To see the joy in a woman who discovers new gifts, who all of a sudden dares to speak up, who recognizes that she can make an impact in other peoples lives - those are big moments!

Her favourite Bible verse is usually the text she is studying at the moment. So right now it is John 4:1-42, Jesus and the Samaritan woman (which she is preparing for the German speaking women's congress in Friedensau next year). But this is a text she comes back to often - so it probably qualifies as a favourite.

Women's Ministries News



National WM events

Women's retreats

At our women's retreats we try to focus on spiritual and physical renewal and on community. The women coming to our retreats are very often the pillars of their local churches – seen or unseen. This special weekend is their weekend to be on the receiving end, their weekend to be served, with good food, a nice surrounding and speakers that can focus on their needs and touch their hearts. I felt personally lead by God to organize our first women's retreat (I wasn't WM director back then), but felt all the way a little doubting voice inside "How will this turn out? Is there really a place for this here in modern Sweden?". The overall blessing of the first retreat was a clear answer to me: Yes, there is a place for it, and yes there definitely is a need for it. (For many women this still is a discovery to make.)

WM leadership training

The leadership training is a real blessing! In Sweden we have been supported by our union conference to offer one training session each year for the last four years. This means we have gone full cycle now and have the first six women who have "graduated". My plan is to continue the leadership training with one level each year, giving our



"graduated" women the possibility to grow in teaching others and new women the chance to get into the program, discovering new gifts and being better equipped to serve the Lord. If you haven't started the leadership training in your country yet, I strongly recommend you to do what you can to get it started. For Sweden this has been a real boost for Women's Ministries!

Local WM initiatives

Prayer partners

The church in Stockholm is a church with quite a big flow of people – there are students, guest professors, professionals on short term appointments and other people just planning to stay for a shorter period. How do you make a spiritual home for them and at the same time ministering to the more "permanent" members of the church? The women's ministries group in Stockholm is doing a fantastic work in trying to make this happen, by getting in touch with new faces, trying to involve new people as soon as possible. One way of doing this is through their "prayer partners" program, in which they pair together women as prayer and accountability partners. It's this kind of relationship that make you feel that you belong somewhere – and the period of time doesn't matter.





Knitting cafés (Växjö, Göteborg, Ekebyholm)

Sonja borrowed the idea of the knitting café from the Swedish state church. The idea is to get some crafty women from church together one evening during the week, prepare “fika” (the Swedish concept of a hot drink together with something to eat) and invite neighbours, friends work colleagues etc. They started the first knitting café in Växjö church and this has been the first outreach program in this church where they



have reached the non-immigrant around the neighbourhood of the church. It's very easy to take a friend. There are no awkward “what should we talk about” situations. When there isn't a given topic – then there is always the knitting in your hand to talk about. In our high speed time, when do you have the time to sit down and talk to someone – and doing that regularly for several hours each week, imagine the possibilities! This is a great “making friends” and “making the church known” activity.

People in Sweden are very secular – and just entering a church building is a huge step for many people. So just having people come to the church for a simple activity as knitting is a big step forward. Therefore it is extremely important to stick to the concept. Don't make an evening announced as knitting café into an evangelistic meeting. Be authentic, be open, and ask the Holy Spirit for guidance. Be sure, there will be abundant possibilities of deep conversations, questions about church activities and faith. It's all about making friends, and spreading the love of Jesus through serving the needs of the community (there are so many lonely people who need a loving place to come to!). Those are the people you can invite for other church activities and small groups, one step at a time! The concept has so far spread to two more churches with equally good response.

Weaving club (Växjö church)

Another outreach activity on the crafty side is the weaving club, also in Växjö. This is one more example of looking into what gifts and possibilities there are in your local context. This includes creativity, being open for God's leading and a big portion of daring. When my (then) local elder and me decided to take the church's basement (which was supposed to be rented out, but had been unused for years since no fitting tenant had been found) and trying to start a weaving activity during the day – now that included a large portion of daring, personal investment (both in time and money) and a lot of praying. After renovating the rooms and travelling all through southern Sweden, buying looms, there we were – with just one interested woman who quit after a couple of weeks. We continued praying, buying more looms and preparing the looms for the women we really didn't know where they should come from.

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And then it happened – this baby grew wings and took off. By now we have fourteen women spending their Wednesday afternoons in the basement of Växjö Adventist church, weaving. And we already had to say no to more women – there is just no room for more looms. Since there is no natural way to include a mini-devotional like we have for our meetings with the knitting-café, it was a conscious decision from the very beginning to not have a devotional and see, how God can lead us into meaningful interaction anyway.

It is astonishing to see what God can do, by us investing our time (and other resources), making us available and inviting people to come to His house. Just the fact that we meet at the church and that we were very clear who we were, that means the pastor and the (then) head elder of this church has opened a door for so many conversations – I probably could write a book about it. The important thing is, that it is not us forcing us on those women, we open the door, and they are approaching us, with THEIR questions on THEIR level, with things that are relevant for THEM. Just one glimpse of what can happen an ordinary Wednesday afternoon in the basement of our church. Me helping a woman trying to sort out some problem with the pedals of her loom (since I am the youngest, crouching under the loom often is my job.... ☺). Sitting under the loom, she all of a sudden approaches me with: “Sonja, you know one thing I always wondered about: this thing with the trinity, how does that work?” Just an ordinary Wednesday in the basement of our church.

Well yes, I forgot to tell you about Kjell, a man coming to both the knitting café and the weaving, even though he is not at all interested in knitting and only slightly interested in weaving. One of the women attending both activities approached him one day while out walking her dogs. He staggered around badly and she thought he was drunk, and really needed help. It turned out that he wasn't drunk but has severe health issues, including very bad balance – and that he was a direct neighbor to her. She saw that he was in really bad shape – and very, very lonely. Not knowing where else she could invite him to, she invited him to the weaving and knitting activities, assuring him “Really, everybody is welcome.” He has been coming ever since, and the last couple of months he has also been a regular visitor at Sabbath service.





News from Cyprus

Marica Mirilov has been married to Branislav for 31 years. Branislav is serving as president of Cyprus Section. They have 3 children and a son-in-law.

Working with children and youth has been a significant part of her ministry for the past 30 years. In the Cyprus Section she has been assigned to the responsibility of Children's Ministries leader for the past 4 years.

Her biggest challenge is that there are endless possibilities, but limited commitment of people.

The biggest joy in her work is the sense of God's presence in every action and His blessings that go beyond our expectations.



On 7 October, in the morning of her 50th birthday she went back to her family house in the spot where she was born. It was a magical moment for her. She tried to sum up half of a century of her life; "Amazing" is the word that best describes it. With her family surrounding her, walking on the paths of her childhood in a small Croatian village, Stari Slatinik, she was back where she started her journey. From Croatia to England, Northern Ireland, Germany, England, Russia to Cyprus, and in different life roles there was a piece of advice that helped me along the way.

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6)



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Cyprus Section

Cyprus Section of the SDA Church consists of two established churches, two church plants and one house fellowship. Women are parts of all spheres of the church life, and they bring riches of diverse cultures and challenges, being away from home and their own families. They lead out in church initiatives and outreach.

Concert

The Municipality Park in Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus, became a venue for the Voices United in Praise concert on 6 March 2016. The event was created as an outreach programme of the Women's International Day of Prayer. It united diverse singing and drama groups and Filipino solo singers from Nicosia and Limassol for two hours of entertainment and inspiration to the audience. The running theme based on Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 encouraged those who were present to remember God in every situation of life.

Around 300 people enjoyed the programme and were given bottles of water. For some, Vibrant Life magazines, religious books and CDs will be a lasting memory from the event given as prizes and freebies.

The warm atmosphere created by beautiful music and drama continued with a bring-and-share picnic. New friendships were made in the beautiful surroundings on that sunny spring day in Cyprus. The following Sabbath several concert attendees joined us for the church service.



Fund raising

One man's unwanted things are indeed another man's treasure. As part of the Sunday Filipino women's ministry during the summer months, unwanted items were regularly sold in front of the Meeting Point, the church community centre in the coastal town of Limassol. Income from sales was used to help various projects, including people in financial difficulties and the local Adventurer and Pathfinder club.

As people were checking the things, this was a good way to connect, exchange smiles and good wishes and invite them for a vegetarian meal and bible study regularly offered at the centre on Sunday afternoons.



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Fitness Day

Cyprus attracts migrant workers and students from many parts of the world. They flood into the central parks in major cities on Sundays, a relaxing place for their day off. This makes it an ideal meeting place for the church and community, an opportunity to connect and share.

A one-day free medical clinic event, promoting fitness, was hosted in the heart of the capital of Cyprus, in the Nicosia Municipality park, by the Seventh-day Adventist church on Sunday, 6 June 2016. Around 150 people registered for weight, sugar level and blood pressure checks, and another 50 benefited from a free manicure, pedicure or manual massage.

On both occasions new friendships were made, hope in God was shared, and for just one day even those who serve their mistresses were treated as ladies. The event was featured in the national newspaper, Cyprus Weekly, with the largest circulation in the country. The event helped us to connect with many people and some of them still join us regularly for Sabbath services.





AYS services – going back to basics

This quarter, the Filipino women action group has resurrected the old-style Adventist Youth Service; Citing bible verses, playing bible quizzes, singing old Adventist hymns is back in fashion in Nicosia church every Sabbath afternoon. Meals are shared with isolated church members and friends and students from different continents. These women know how to create a family atmosphere and take care of each 'family' member.



New WM leader in Greece

Despina Avakian has been married to Petros Avakian for 25 years and they have two grown-up daughters – 25 and 20 year-olds.

She has been working for the department since September 2016 so it is only a few months yet. She is also the Messy Church leader in Katerini Church and she does a wonderful job there.

She enjoys communicating with other people. Her favourite Bible text is from John 18:23.

“If I said something wrong,” Jesus replied, “testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?”

