



WOMEN IN
CHURCH AND
SOCIETY
THE LUTHERAN
WORLD FEDERATION

From the LWF Institutional Memory

Women on the Move – Her Story:



Name:	Rev. Eva Zabolai-Csekme
Country of origin:	Hungary
Date of birth:	09.02.1943
Church:	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary
Period of mandate:	1972—1980, first Secretary of the Women's Desk of the Lutheran World Federation

Short biography:

At the time of her appointment in January 1972, Eva Zabolai-Csekme, born in Hungary, was reading sociology at Berkeley, California (USA). Her particular areas of interest were feminist studies and liberation theology and her colleague and successor, Eva von Hertzberg, described her as “a pastor with a special gift for worship and a truly good person who had the ability to analyze and summarize.” In an unpublished document entitled “The Work of the LWF Women’s Desk,” Zabolai-Csekme was described as a “young, emancipated and fighting person.”

At the time, the feminist approach to theology was completely new for the LWF and its constituency, as was the challenge to include women in the life and work of the Federation. As the first Secretary of the Women’s Desk, controversially located in the Department of Studies, Zabolai-Csekme was responsible for the two programs “Continuing Education for Women” and “Church Structures and Worship.” Despite the numerous gifts Eva brought to the LWF, those early “ground-breaking” days were all but easy. Nonetheless, despite serious obstacles and the many struggles faced by women during this period in the history of the LWF, women’s work was systematically developed and the number of Lutheran churches ordaining women increased in the 1970s.

In the first years of Zabolai-Csekme’s term, she established contacts, assessed the needs in the member churches and shaped what later was to be called the Office of Women in Church and Society (WICAS). In the book, *Eva, wo bist du?* Zabolai-Csekme summarizes the first period as follows: “New social realities demand new answers. Women of Western countries now have to identify with those sisters who are victims of oppression, exploitation and injustice. The witness of the church is credible only if it is congruent in word and deed.”

One of the ways for the LWF Women’s Desk to be “congruent in word and deed” was through a series of leadership training events. The first leadership training workshop, held in Ethiopia in 1973, was followed by ten similar seminars in different parts of the world (1974—1977). In every case, their content was determined by each local church. The need to develop “adequate female” leadership in the member became the top priority of the Women’s Desk. In the first issue of the Women’s Desk’s newsletter in October 1974, Eva Zabolai-Csekme remarked, “One of the most obvious obstacles to finding satisfactory solutions is the lack of adequate leadership among women on all levels [...]. Therefore we regard the development of adequate female leadership as the *number one task* of the LWF Women’s Desk.”

[based on *The Continuing Journey: Women’s Participation in the Lutheran World Federation*, 1992, pp. 35—39).