



WOMEN IN
CHURCH AND
SOCIETY
THE LUTHERAN
WORLD FEDERATION

From the LWF Institutional Memory

Women on the Move – Her Story:



Executive Committee of the LWF elected at the Evian Assembly, 1970. Photo LWF Archives

Name: Bodil Soelling
Country of origin: Denmark
Date of birth: 1922
Date of death: 2008
Church: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark
Period of mandate: Delegate Assembly Evian, 1970, elected Executive Committee member until 1977, reelected at the 1977 Dar Es Salaam and 1984 Budapest LWF Assemblies

Short biography: Bodil Soelling went to secondary school during the German occupation. In 1943, she joined the resistance group but when the group was denounced, she had to hide underground in a parsonage and her stay there had a considerable influence on her life. Among others she met Professor E. Skydsgaard, who guided her toward humanitarian aid and church cooperation across ecumenical borders. After the war, Mr Skydsgaard hired her as a secretary to the bishop of Hollestein. When he was asked to direct the church's

refugee work in Germany, she followed him. In Germany she met her husband Erik, who had been secretary for war prisoners in the national YMCA and, after the war, worked at the International YMCA. He was also engaged in church refugee work. In 1951, after their marriage, they moved to Asklund, a congregation on the island of Falster where her husband became the parish pastor until he retired in 1996. She had four children: Lone (1951), Per (1953), Lars (1955) and Elsebeth (1962). Despite her work as a mother and wife of a pastor, she became involved in welcoming Hungarian refugees who had left Hungary following the crisis in 1956. She and her husband led a center for Hungarian refugees in Maribo. From 1960, she became a member of the Volkschurch in Nadjasm (VCN) and at the same time its secretary. Later, she became vice-general secretary of VCN. As she took over this administrative work, she also became responsible for the contact with churches in particularly difficult situations, not least in Eastern Europe. Whenever there was a need, Bodil went herself and under extreme conditions she undertook a lot of project meetings including in war torn Eritrea. Other projects included aid to Poland. Parallel with her responsibility at VCN, Bodil was engaged in voluntary work, not least in the national church organization. In 1970, she represented the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark at the LWF Fifth Assembly in Evian, France and was elected the only women member of the LWF Executive Committee for one term until the LWF Sixth Assembly in Budapest, 1984 where she ran for the presidency. She was the chairperson of one of the preparatory committees for the Budapest Assembly and visited Ethiopia at the time of the revolution to help in various projects. *From Federation to Communion* (p. 409), describes how, in a world of men, Soelling was the first woman to run for the LWF presidency. In the first ballot for the presidency at the 1984 LWF Assembly in Budapest, Soelling (78 votes) defeated Bishop David Preuss (52 votes) of the American Lutheran Church and Professor Roger Nostbakken (31 votes) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada. Bishop Kaldy from Hungary got 136 votes. In the final ballot, Bishop Kaldy defeated Bodil Soelling by 173 votes to 124 for political reasons. In 1990, she formally retired but continued her activity as voluntary consultant and speaker for the FKK. In 1997 she was 75. It was obvious that her heart went out to the suffering in the world. She was one of the "LWF elders" at the LWF 50th anniversary celebrations at the LWF Ninth Assembly where she spoke to the new generations who had taken over the work and who carry the flame further. (From www.kvinfo.dk)