



WOMEN IN
CHURCH AND
SOCIETY
THE LUTHERAN
WORLD FEDERATION

From the LWF Institutional Memory

Women on the Move – Her Story:



Hannover Assembly 1952, reception for women by women to the left: Mrs Elizabeth Meiser, centre: Mrs Erna Lilje and to the right: Sister Eva Lyngby from Denmark, first woman to get elected to the Executive Committee (as a consultant). LWF Photo Archives

Name: Eva Lyngby
Country of origin: Denmark
Date of birth: 1898
Date of death: 1975
Church: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark
Period of mandate: Delegate Assembly Lund, 1947 and Assembly in Hanover, 1952, elected member of the Executive Committee

Short biography: In the 1952 Assembly, a change in the LWF constitution was effected requiring that at least four of the members of the Executive Committee be laymen. The last Assembly nominated these four individuals and in 1953 when the constitutional provision went into effect they were elected full members of the Executive Committee: Sister Eva Lyngby, Mr Charles Delbruck, President Judge James Henniger and Dr Rudolf Weeber. This provision to increase the number of laity has been a very important element in the development of the LWF and rejoice over the fact that these men and woman have been able to attend regularly and participate in the debate and decisions taken by the Executive Committee (*Report of the Executive Committee 1952-1957*). Sister Eva was a deaconess who had trained as a nurse. In 1947, she was elected to the governing board of the International Federation of Deaconess Work in Utrecht and participated in the first LWF Assembly in 1947. Of thirteen women delegates

(6.4%) at the 1952 LWF Assembly in Hannover she was elected as a consultant to the Executive Committee of the LWF until the 1957 LWF Assembly in the USA. (Cf. *The Continuing Journey: Women's Participation in the Lutheran World Federation, 1992*) Eva's father was the pastor of Saint Paul Church in Århus. She was one of four girls and her father was very disappointed as he had very much wanted a boy. Nonetheless, he gave her the second name "Benedicte," the blessed one, meaning that she was a gift from God and should not be brought up as "not wanted." She became the sunshine of her family who were very close. The parsonage, a home of great hospitality, was visited by many important people. Her father really wanted his daughters to have a good education, to be free and to be shown respect in public. He also inspired them to ride a bicycle which was against the social mores of the time. In return, he expected a lot of Eva, especially that she get a good job. For the last fifteen years of the father's life the parents moved to Copenhagen and the fifteen-year-old Eva went back to Århus to finish her school. Because of her father's sudden death she could not finish her exams. She had to return to her mother and start to work in an insurance company. In the following years she was influenced by the vision of youth pastor Olfert Ricard and lay preacher Frieda Tomsen. Despite serious talks with her family and friends, who made her aware of many job opportunities, she followed the call to become a deaconess and a nurse. At the age of eighteen she went to Saint Luke's Foundation, a deaconess' house, because they were strict and their lifestyle appealed to her. The following year, she started training as a nurse. She was highly competent, always mastering the situation and coming to the forefront. She graduated as a nurse 1923 and the following year was unanimously elected and appointed as director of the whole institution. She became the first female director of Saint Luke's at the age of only twenty-six. A big responsibility was put on her shoulders and she used her entire time for administration and institutional work. Even if she was very young, she also took on the role of a mother for all the sisters and created a home for them. Contrary to the previous director, she managed to gain the respect of pastors because of her excellent work in the community and more sisters joined the institution. During her leadership, the deaconesses moved to a new, larger house which also became a home for small children, an orphanage. She also founded a home for priests, doctors and elderly sisters. During this time, it also became a modern hospital with its own nursing school. Between the wars, Eva supported the development of state welfare and social care. For example, upon her initiative, the sisters took care of the elderly as well as the sick at home. During her father's long illness, Eva had learned to take care of the suffering and understood that this could become a life-long vocation. She agreed to create the country's best school for nurses already in 1925. This reform was initially not well received as it was deemed that sisters learn besides the bed and not at the school desk. Based on this criticism, Eva created a curriculum. In 1940, she led the sisters' school board and recruited new sisters by means of meetings and articles in order to educate young women who were called to be deaconesses. It was her goal to work in this area of the church and do diaconal work, be well known nationally as well as internationally, and write a lot of speeches and articles. This engagement implied important travel in- and outside the country. In spite of the travel she had a lot of contact with her family and became an inspiration for her niece who embraced the same career. She retired in 1965 and lived at the deaconesses' house until she died in 1975. During her last years she suffered from a serious illness. Eva was described as a visionary with a strong personality and gifts for administrative work. She received the Florence Nightingale medal and many other distinctions and was the author of many articles and books. From 1952—1957, as a deaconess, her church appointed her as a delegate of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark to the 1952 LWF Assembly in Hannover where she was elected for a term on the Executive Committee of the LWF until 1957. (From www.kvinfo.dk)