



WOMEN IN  
CHURCH AND  
SOCIETY  
THE LUTHERAN  
WORLD FEDERATION

From the LWF Institutional Memory

## Women on the move – Her story:



*August 1978: the governing committee for the Lutheran World Federation Community Development Service met in early August in Geneva to consider requests for development projects from member churches and related agencies around the world. Shown are from left: Ms Mary Henry of the USA, Mr Moses Amkongo from Namibia, both member of the Committee, Ms Gudrun Diestel from Germany, chairperson of the LWF Commission on World Service, Dr Paul Wee, General Secretary of the LWF/USA national Committee, Dr Ernst Eherhard from Germany, director of the German Board – Lutheran World Service and Church cooperation and the Rev. George Posfay, Latin America Secretary for the LWF Department of church cooperation LWF Photo Archives*

<b>Name:</b>	Rev. Gudrun Diestel (Oberkirchenrätin)
<b>Country of origin:</b>	Germany
<b>Date of birth:</b>	xxx
<b>Church:</b>	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover
<b>Period of Mandate:</b>	LWF Executive Committee advisor 1977-1984. <b>On 5 July 1977 LWI reports:</b> “For the first time, a woman was chosen to head an LWF Commission. Oberkirchenrätin

*Gudrun Diestel of the Federal republic of Germany is the new chairperson of the Commission on World Service."*

**Short biography:**

In July 1963, was held the First International Conference for Lutheran women in Schmalensee, Germany, a three-day pre-Assembly gathering which was limited to 50 participants, approved by the then LWF Commission on Stewardship and Congregational Life, prior to the LWF Assembly in Helsinki which served also as women's pre-Assembly conference, entitled Christian women today. In the book: *"The continuing journey: women's participation in the LWF"*, it states: *"According to Gudrun Diestel, the American women had the money and the Germans were very poor, but we gave what we had. We had very good methods of Bible study, and having gone through the Nazi experience, we had some very strong lay leadership. We knew the power of the Bible in times of persecution and resistance. So together, we made up the programme"*. P. 25 it continues: *"Insight into the situation was provided by Gudrun Diestel, who helped organize the women's pre-conference meeting at Schmalensee: What developed quickly in those days was a growing knowledge of other continents: Asia, Africa, South America. It was a time when people were still working under the concept of younger churches. What happened was that the Northern Hemisphere made up the programme so that we would have people from other countries make representations. We had women represented from all over the world and these women were invited to the Assembly at Helsinki...Mistakes were made in those early days, and the women learned from them. Madeline Dubot, a European woman, spoke on the situation of women in Asia and Africa. Today we would never think of doing such a thing. Nevertheless, perspectives were being broadened. We learned from Schmalensee."* What was new was the realization of how important it was for women to come together. The appointment of three women to the Commission was simply not enough. The voices of women needed to be heard in every part of the LWF. The result of the Assembly was the formation of the "Continuation Committee on women's work". Rev. Gudrun Diestel was appointed one member together with Gannela Walom from Ethiopia, Dr Prodduki David from India, Dr Dorothy Haas from the USA and Dr Antonie Nopitsch from Germany...When Dr Nopitsch, Rev. Gudrun Diestel and Margit Lindstrom met in Stein in August 1967, they were informed that the LWF Executive Committee would not support plans for a Evian LWF pre-assembly conference for financial reasons. A week or two later, the women appeared in Geneva...the Executive Director said he understood the difficulty, but that there was no money. The women were given a nice dinner but that did not help...How to be involved in the preparation of the next Assembly to take place at Evian in 1970?

1969: The pre-Assembly conference took place in Bastad, Sweden and attended by 40 women from LWF member churches from the whole world including Gudrun Diestel.

1975: Gudrun Diestel had been appointed to WICAS advisory Committee.

In 1977, at Dar es Salaam, 4 women were elected on the 30 members Executive Committee (then Council) of the LWF: Ms Dorothy Marple from the USA, Ms Fibi Nancy Nadah from the Lutheran Church of Christ in the Sudan (Nigeria), Rev Annette Nuber from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Oldenburg and Ms Bodil Soelling, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark and Gudrun Diestel, chairperson of the LWF/WS Commission until 1984. Of these years as chairperson of the WS Commission, there are many beautiful humanitarian stories under the leadership of Gudrun Diestel, in the LWF Archives.