



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 Budapest Assembly 1984, LWF Photo Archives*

**Name:** Susannah B. Telewoda

**Date of birth:** 21.08.1941

**Church:** Lutheran Church in Liberia

**Period of mandate:** 1984-1990: First LWF Vice-president for Africa

**Short biography:** When the late Bishop Roland J. Payne selected Mrs. Susan Telewoda to serve as a delegate to the LWF Main Assembly in 1984 in Budapest, Hungary, she was simply a faithful church goer who believed in being actively involved in her local church. To her surprise, at the Assembly, she was elected as one of the five vice presidents for the Lutheran World Federation. Her role was to serve the church on the African Continent and she had the distinction of being the first African woman to serve in this position. Although her election was a surprise both at home and abroad, she states, "I don't think personally that it had anything to do with me. I didn't know anyone

[at the Assembly] and I had never seen most of those people before. I was a newcomer. It was just by the grace of God that it all happened.”

Despite her initial reservations, she graciously accepted the position, in which she served from 1984 through 1990, at the onset of the Liberia Civil War. Looking back over those years, she believes that God truly positioned her for that role at the right time. Having decided to quit her formal employment in 1984 to care for an ailing parent, it was months later when the Bishop’s request was present to her – which she felt that she could not refuse. In the LWF, she is known for having been very outspoken during her mandate.

Although her term of service coincided with some major events globally and across the African Continent, she feels that she had overwhelming support compared to women from other regions of the world. “From my local church [in Liberia], women had the freedom to do what they were capable of doing, so I didn’t come from a history of those kinds of [gender] barriers. Whatever I was asked to do, I had no problem in fulfilling the task within the parameters with which our church had afforded me and other women in our church,” she affirms. She also highlights the conscientious effort by LWF to actively engage women in leadership roles during that era.

Reflecting on her greatest achievement during her tenure, she recalls the successful efforts made to reconcile the global and regional Lutheran churches of the apartheid region of Southern Africa. She knows that there is still more work to be done and affirms strongly that women can and should be an active part of the church’s work and transformation of society. “Often women shy away from what has to be done. Women should try to do whatever they have been asked to do, because there is already a bias to not allow women to be in diverse positions, and [the lack of women in these key roles] would reinforce the stereotype that women cannot fulfill these various tasks” she cautions.

Mrs. Telewoda is now retired but continues to work primarily in educational causes. She operates a vocational training school for the youth living with Down Syndrome, to provide them with life and survival skills in Liberia. By: Nyamah E. Dunbar