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Love One Another



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SUPPORT PLEDGED





BULGARIA



Imagine a room filled with women of all ages, the air buzzing with conversation, lots of smiles and greetings going around as the women see old friends and make new ones. Some of the women are dressed up, others more casual. Morning is worship time, including Bible study, singing and lots of just praising the Lord. The afternoons are full of various workshops to choose from based on your interests. Food and coffee breaks are plentiful and often, and many good conversations take place around the dinner table or a cup of coffee. Evenings are filled with fun and interesting programs.

Does this scene sound familiar? It does to me, and probably to you if you are female and have ever attended a Christian women's conference! It could be the scene at any American Baptist Women's Ministries conference in any location throughout the United States, or really, any

place women gather together. It was a similar scene, but with a definite European influence, at the European Baptist Women's Union (EBWU) conference I had the privilege of attending in September. This conference is held every five years at different locations throughout Europe and attended by women from nearly every country in Europe and some from Central Asia. It was held in the beautiful city of Lviv, Ukraine, and was attended by 90 women from 30 different countries. It was held a few days before the annual council meeting of the European Baptist Federation (EBF). This year the women were celebrating their 70-year jubilee, making the women's organization one year older than the EBF!

As the women gathered, there was lots of conversation, smiles, and European cheek-kisses as friends from different countries, cultures and backgrounds were reunited once again. Only the conversations were in Russian or Ukrainian, Hungarian or Romanian, Dutch or German, Croatian, Serbian or Bosnian, Swedish, Danish or Norwegian, Spanish or English. The common language was English, but I could hear the hum of heart-language translation going on in small groups where there were women who didn't understand English very well. The "Love One Another" conference theme especially resonated with some of the women. The ongoing war in Eastern Ukraine makes the Ukrainian women realize how important it is to pass on their faith and to love and encourage their brothers and sisters in that region. In some Muslim-majority countries, it may be hard to love your neighbors after they throw stones at your family and call you a traitor for becoming a Christian.

Former EBWU president Yona Pusey writes about the very first meeting of what would become the EBWU:

"In 1948 Baptist world leaders convened a meeting in London, England to consider issues of peace and reconciliation with particular reference to post-war Europe. Countries were specifically invited to include women in their delegations. The programme was a full one,

but late one night the American and European women made time to meet in a hotel foyer in order to explore to possibilities of closer future cooperation.

Women whose husbands and sons had been fighting on different sides during the war came face to face with each other—and discovered two things: On one hand they recognized an underlying desire for an increase in fellowship and reconciliation; but on the other hand, many of the twelve or so women uncovered their feelings of anger and bitterness—the legacy of war. Could any progress towards reconciliation be made even among this small group?

During the previous 40 years women on both sides of the Atlantic had cherished the dream of a world-wide fellowship of Baptist women. Poor communications and two World Wars had postponed the dream several times, but here was an opportunity by God's grace not to be missed.

One of the American sisters was inspired to invite the group to stand in a circle and, while holding hands, to repeat the words of John 3:16 each in their own language...The Holy Spirit moved among the women; tears flowed and melted bitter hearts. A sense of unity in Christ and the reality of the love of God enabled them to overcome the past, and to lay the foundations for a new Europe-wide fellowship of Baptist women."

Throughout the 50s and 60s, the prayer of the EBWU was "Lord, give us fellowship with our sisters in Eastern Europe." Increasing contacts were made with their sisters behind the Iron Curtain, but because of the political situation, visits were seldom possible. An East German sister was elected vice president in 1972, but she was never able to attend any meetings as she was never successful in getting the necessary visas.

In the 1990s, women from both the East and the West were able to meet together often and get to know each other. They learned to embrace their differences and accept each other because of the love of Christ.

I am proud to have been able to attend the 70th anniversary conference of this strong and courageous group of women who, even today, continue to overcome boundaries of race, religion, country and culture to embrace their differences and love one another. Indeed, the Holy Spirit was with the gathering in Lviv in 2018, just as it was with those few ladies in that London hotel lobby in 1948. It was truly inspiring to worship and study together with these women. I hope you will enjoy some of the pictures of the conference. Many more pictures can be seen on the [EBWU website](#).



Central Baptist Church in Lviv,
Ukraine



Ukrainian bread



Celebration Cake



European Baptist Federation Anti-human Trafficking Working Group



Bulgarian delegation–Terry Myers, Didi Oprenova, Steffi Georgieva