

## Female leadership faces barriers worldwide

International training program of UEM promotes women in church leadership roles

**Hattingen/Wuppertal, June 27, 2025** – Ten female leaders from member churches of the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) in Rwanda, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Botswana, Tanzania, and Germany gathered at the Haus Friede conference center in Hattingen (Germany) from June 21 to 26. The occasion was the first international training program *Women's Leadership Training* organized by UEM. Under the title "Strategic Empowerment: Intersectional Advocacy through Effective Planning," the week-long training program focused on the challenges and opportunities of female leadership in the church and society.

The focus was on practical training, strategic networking, and exchange on topics such as intersectional advocacy, gender justice, leadership styles, and participation in church politics. The aim was to strengthen women in their leadership roles and encourage them to actively shape church power structures.

"Those who stand up for justice must have the courage to question patriarchal structures – in society as well as in the church," emphasizes Thea Hummel, head of the advocacy department at UEM and organizer of the training. "Gender justice is not a marginal issue, but a central concern for the credibility of church work."

### Global challenges for women in leadership roles

Jenny Purba, pastor of the Indonesian Simalungun Church, describes: "Most nomination committees are dominated by men – and they in turn usually elect men to leadership positions. In order for women to have any chance at all of reaching leadership positions, we need binding rules for gender parity in such committees."

Dorothea Goudefroy, superintendent of the Protestant Church District of Vlotho (Evangelical Church of Westphalia), also confirms social inequalities: "Men are traditionally more likely to be trusted with leadership skills, while women often have to prove themselves first. Fortunately, however, we are seeing more and more women applying for leadership positions in the church."

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Thobo Letlhage, president of the Women's League of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Botswana, sees parallels between the continents: "The challenges for women in leadership positions are similar in Africa, Asia, and Europe—whether it's stereotypical role models or limited access to resources. The workshop helped us develop concrete strategies for our respective contexts."

An intensive program of workshops, case studies, group work, and individual reflection enabled the participants to develop regional action plans for sustainable advocacy work. With its *Women's Leadership Training*, UEM specifically promotes women in leadership positions in order to create more equitable structures in the church and society.

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**About "UEM"**

*The United Evangelical Mission (UEM) is an international and equal community with 39 members, including 38 Protestant churches in Africa and Asia and Germany as well as the v. Bodelschwinghschen Foundations Bethel.*

*With offices in Germany, Indonesia, and Tanzania, UEM pursues a holistic understanding of mission that goes beyond spiritual proclamation. At its core is a commitment to people in need and disadvantaged people with the aim of improving their living conditions, respecting their dignity, and valuing their cultural context.*