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Pop Up Monastery 2015

A project of the Young women's group of the
Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women
(EFECW)



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BACKGROUND

At the General Assembly of the EFECW in August 2010 in Loccum, Germany, a group of young women expressed their wish to increase their involvement with the work and life of the Forum to ensure its future. The commitment of these young women became visible through their willingness to take on responsibilities. An ad hoc group put forward two candidates for the Coordinating Committee (CC), the leading board of the Forum. The young women experienced a great support from the Assembly. Vivie Mavroska from Greece and Carla Maurer from Switzerland were elected as Co-President and CC member as representatives of the younger generation. This was an encouraging experience and showed the good relationships between the generations in the Forum.

Since then, the EFECW has integrated a “Young Women’s Strategy” as one of their priorities, encouraging the National Coordinators to invite young women and providing funds and structures to allow them to travel to international meetings. The strategy soon showed first impacts. At the NC meeting in Druskininkai, Lithuania in September 2011 there was an even more visible generational diversity. A workshop open to all generations came up with proposals. One proposal was adopted, and is now being implemented as the first project of the EFECW Young Women’s Group: The Pop Up Monastery.

A steering group was formed. The six members of the group first met in August 2012 in London and subsequently in February 2013 in Berlin. From the beginning, it has been vital for the group to learn from the experiences of the founders and longstanding members of the Forum. Therefore, at every meeting a member of the Forum of the respective country where the meeting takes place is invited for a session, to listen, exchange and give advice. At the same



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EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

The Pop Up Monastery itself as well as the whole preparation process is a learning platform where the participants can acquire new skills and gain self confidence. Women will have the opportunity to contribute to the project at different stages: through workshops, preparatory meetings and during the monastic life itself, by bringing in their talents and experiences and taking on leadership for certain areas. A particular focus is on women and leadership: What is good leadership? To what extent does our gender influence leadership?

Our aims are:

- To create a safe environment where women can leave their comfort zone and experiment with new skills
- To encourage women to take on leadership and develop a positive approach to power
- To share responsibilities and recognise different styles of carrying them out
- To face up to difficult situations in daily life through spiritual strength and a sense of belonging
- To share life stories and build up relationships that can carry women through difficult times
- To tackle conflicts through conversation and consensus finding.



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derline the commonalities rather than what separates us. We acknowledge that every age has its treasures. At the same time it is equally important that this project gives younger women the opportunity to take charge of their own experiences, and to be involved in planning and running an ecumenical event at a European level.

Our aims are:

- To pass on skills and knowledge from generation to generation in both directions, through common preparation, prayer and workshops.
- To redefine what it means to 'be old' and to 'be young' and to rethink the perception of age: how we see ourselves and how we are seen by others related to our biological age.
- To share experiences of marginalisation and societal expectations (beauty, family, sexuality, profession, the 'cult of youth'...)
- To work with the 'four ages of the woman' and find out what age represents in our self-perception and our personalities.
- To find our role in the community according to our age, and to find rituals of transformation to express these roles.



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time, it is equally important for the young women that they can go through their own process of learning and experiencing the joys and struggles of ecumenical cooperation and pass it on to even younger generations.

The Pop Up Monastery is planned to take place in summer 2015 (venue to be confirmed) for a period of 3-4 weeks. It will be open for women of all ages, denominations and regions who wish to contribute to the spiritual development of the Forum, to the intergenerational exchange and mutual learning and who are longing for a personal spiritual retreat in an intercultural environment.



An extended steering group meeting is scheduled for early 2015, in order to invite other women to contribute to the practical planning of the Pop Up Monastery and to give them an opportunity to shape the life of the EFECW.

The overall aims of the EFECW (ecology, economy and ecumenical sharing) will be reflected in the programme of the Pop Up Monastery.

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

Acknowledging the crisis of Christian belief in Europe and the lack of answers people seem to find in church, we observe the increasing need for spiritual development amongst young people. There is a wish for personal spiritual experiences across the generations.



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‘Believing without belonging’ is a part of our reality. Women wish to develop their own spirituality in a context they chose. The influence of other religions and more secular forms of spirituality changes the ways in which faith is expressed. At the same time, traditional forms of spirituality are becoming more attractive. They give guidance in societies with an unclear perspective and diminishing security for the individual.

Our aims are:

- To provide space for individual spiritual development, including the rich spiritual traditions of our denominations
- To provide an environment for recreation, acknowledging the often stressful life women are facing, having to respond to various expectations and pressure. A natural and quiet environment is a key to achieve this aim.
- To be mindful of our own limits and develop sensitivity for each other.
- To create a ‘spiritual toolbox’ of rituals and prayers to take home and integrate in our daily live and work.
- To enrich the spiritual life of the EFECW and the ecumenical movement as a whole.
- To create a welcoming atmosphere and a space of hospitality (good “housekeeping”).

ECUMENICAL AND INTERCULTURAL EXPERIENCE

As members of the European ecumenical women’s network we have the privilege to experience the enriching benefits of intercultural and ecumenical exchange. It has become part of our identity. We acknowledge the challenge of intercultural cooperation, knowing that



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the enrichment goes hand in hand with moments of frustration and misunderstanding. As members of the EFECW we are particularly interested in the different life experiences of young women having grown up in a separated Europe and how the historic East/West division still influences us today. We acknowledge the variety of experiences with the Church – from strictly structured traditional churches to more flexible and loosely structured churches. We are convinced that ‘ora et labora’, believing and living together, will bring us closer together and foster the European peace project that all too often is taken for granted.

Our aims are:

- To share our enthusiasm with others and enable a growing number of women to experience the enrichment of intercultural and ecumenical exchange in a peaceful environment
- To create a non-judgemental environment without ‘denominational competition’, open for doubts, questions and different approaches to faith
- To experience Christian spirituality through different methods (arts, prayer, meditation, sharing, going on pilgrimage, discussion, silence ...) in order to gain a deeper understanding of one other than is usually possible by words.

INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING

In addition to the ecumenical and cultural plurality, we consider the gathering of three generations as one of the most powerful aspects of the EFECW. It is a platform for solidarity and for dialogue that is dramatically decreasing in our societies. Acknowledging that we all experience similar expectations, pressures and (dis-) advantages based on our gender across both the generations and the countries we live in, we want to look at ‘age’ from another perspective and un-



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