

Ecumenical Continuing Formation
on
Youth, Transformative Masculinity and Femininity in the Pacific
A WCC Youth-Indigenous-JCWM Programmatic Collaboration
18-26 June 2020

Background

In June 2020, the World Council of Churches (WCC) will hold its annual Ecumenical Continuing Formation on young people with a focus on Transformative Masculinity and Femininity in the Pacific region. This is a collaborative event of WCC's programmes on Youth Engagement in the ecumenical movement, Mission from the Margins (MM), and the Just Community of Women and Men (JCWM).

The Pacific Council of Churches (PCC) has identified the following concerns among young people in the region: climate justice, mental health, unemployment, and gender-based violence. In-line with the WCC pilgrimage of justice and peace theme for its 2020 Pacific regional focus of 'Climate Justice and Nuclear Disarmament', the ECF has a specific emphasis on impact of climate change on mental health, in relation to the overall theme.

Following its aim to connect the global ecumenical movement to the local context, WCC will engage with the local young people at the Tongan national ecumenical youth gathering. The national gathering will host around 5,000 young people from the country. WCC will bring in 30 young people from Pacific mostly and other delegations from around the world. Tonga's Minister of Health and Acting Minister on Internal Affairs stated in the 2019 report on Gender Equality

Four core values underpin Tongan society: Humility; Relationships; Loyalty; and Respect. Humility and openness to learning, has been critical in Tonga's efforts to address gender inequality. Tonga recognises the importance of the participation of both women and men in development and planning. While significant progress has been made in increasing the number of women in leadership positions and in education, Tonga has encountered challenges, notably in the area of women's political participation and in the ratification of Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Despite widespread misconceptions associated with the implications of CEDAW ratification, it is important to consider the positive impacts that this human rights instrument would make in the lives of Tongan women and girls, ensuring their protection from violence and abuse.

Additionally, the *New Zealand Medical Journal report in May 2017 indicated that there is a higher risk of suicide among New Zealand's Pacific youth aged 12 to 18, with attempted suicide rate for Pasifika being 8.6 %*. Some of this is attributed to migration and to family pressures. Youth suicide is not an issue isolated to New Zealand. Studies published in 2014 and 2017 indicate that Pacific youth particularly between the ages of 15-29 are increasingly more at risk of committing suicide. The social and economic challenges of living in a rapidly changing world, together with the stigma of mental health and the culture of silence, make it difficult for young people to speak openly about the challenges they are facing as well seek the help they need.

Gathering with Pacific and indigenous youth in Tonga at the time of their youth assembly affords an opportunity for solidarity and accompaniment on these two key issues, which are exceptionally prevalent albeit culturally taboo in the Pacific region.

Objectives

The Ecumenical Continuing Formation on Youth, Transformative Masculinities and Femininities gathering in June 2020, brings together Pacific youth to:

- Address sub-themes on Climate Justice, Mental Health (trauma and healing) and sexual and gender based violence concerns among Pacific islanders;
- Emphasise, affirm and draw from the wisdom of indigenous culture and spirituality in addressing these challenges;
- Promote positive masculinities and femininities among Pacific youth to counter traditional norms that contribute to sexual and gender based violence (especially in the homes and church);
- Strengthen youth capacity and create tools for addressing these concerns;
- Develop an outline of theological study materials and practical action plans on healing and reconciliation as a holistic approach to sustainable living informed by Indigenous spirituality, theology, and traditions;
- Encourage and strengthen links with the WCC Youth desk and programme ensuring close ongoing collaboration and solidarity between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Youth as good practice and for mutual enrichment and support.
- Proactively contribute strong youth leadership to the WCC Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace agenda and activities in the lead up to General Assembly 2021 and post-Assembly;

Outcomes

The following are proposed outcomes of the Ecumenical Continuing Formation

- A database of resources for young Pasifika people on the promotion of positive masculinities and femininities is set up online, including the Thursdays In Black young ambassadors network
- A Pasifika Youth Call to Action on “Climate Justice and Nuclear Disarmament” to the Pasifika churches and beyond
- A network of Indigenous young people between different regions, who are present at the youth gathering is established with the objective of this network being widened post the Tonga gathering
- A draft outline of theological study materials and practical action tools on healing and reconciliation informed by indigenous spirituality, theology and traditions is completed
- A youth engagement in the ecumenical movement consultative document of the Pasifika young people, which will be forwarded to the 11th WCC Assembly in 2021

Participants

WCC will bring in 30 young people from Pacific mostly and other delegations from around the world. In addition, the WCC-ECF will facilitate a session to address the assembly participants to the Tongan national ecumenical youth assembly, which will gather around 5,000 young people from the country.

As the gathering is a WCC Indigenous-Youth-JCWM collaborative effort, the participants will also consist of Indigenous youth from the wider ecumenical community outside of the Pacific.