

EMS YOUTH POLICY

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CONTENT

EMS YOUTH POLICY.....	Page 02
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1. BIBLICAL ASPECTS AND BASIC PRINCIPLES

When we look at the New Testament, Jesus and most of the apostles were of an age that we would today categorise as Youth. Biblical texts explicitly include young and old people: “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household. [...] then he and his entire family were baptized without delay.” (Acts 16:31,33)

During missionary work, great emphasis was put on the salvation of households, which was revolutionary at that time. Great efforts were made to encourage all generations, young and old, to participate and benefit from Christian mission. Jesus admonished his disciples that they could learn from children how to receive the kingdom of God (Mark 10:13-15). Timothy, Titus and other young people contributed with their resources, gifts and abilities to missionary work. The inclusion of young people in the mission significantly contributed to its success.

EMS Constitution states in several contexts that the EMS Fellowship shall “enhance life and, in particular, advocate the rights of vulnerable, poor and marginalised people” (§ 2,2). It explains: “The aims may be fulfilled by, in particular, ... organising educational programmes for children, young people and women” (§ 3,2). In the composition of EMS bodies, the aim shall be a balanced representation of men and women, ordained and lay people and different age groups.

2. SCOPE AND PURPOSE

Young people are an essential part of the EMS Fellowship. Young people always welcome any opportunity to voice their opinions and participate in taking action on matters concerning their faith, society and the future of the EMS Fellowship. This policy is aimed at providing guidelines on how to enable young people to participate in EMS. Young people are not only the future but also the present of EMS.

3. THE INTERNATIONAL EMS YOUTH NETWORK

EMS members have established youth groups based on their respective organisation. The definition of who is a young person varies among the members of EMS. For EMS youth work, the maximum age limit is defined as 35 years old, taking into consideration that the different youth age brackets in various regions need to be respected. Nevertheless, EMS programmes may have specific age requirements.

In accordance with § 17 of the EMS Constitution, young people belonging to EMS member churches and member organisations shall be organised in an International Youth Network for the purposes of fellowship and exchange,

effective mobilisation, education and communication. Membership of the EMS International Youth Network is open to representatives of the youth groups of all EMS members, former EMS volunteers, youth participants in EMS projects and any other young people of EMS members who are interested in the worldwide ecumenical movement and wish to join the network.

The aim of the International Youth Network shall be to give voice to the concerns of young people in EMS. At the same time, it contributes to broadcasting EMS activities among young people and helps to actively involve them in EMS programmes and projects. This adds an ecumenical and missionary perspective to existing youth work performed by EMS members.

The International Youth Network shall have regular international meetings to gather the opinions of young people on relevant topics within EMS and its members. These meetings shall also inform young members in EMS bodies on what the concerns of the youth are and transmit these concerns to the bodies of EMS and its members.

Regional working groups of the Youth Network shall be established in each region of EMS members in agreement with existing structures and designated contact persons. However, each member shall decide on who the contact persons will be for the EMS International Youth Network based on their own regulations and in consultation with the local members of the EMS Youth Network. The regional working groups shall support the EMS Youth Network in their own area. They will be informed about new members joining from their own area and can also participate in nominating young persons to represent their church and the local Youth Network in accordance with existing structures.

Young members in EMS bodies shall be encouraged to actively participate in the Youth Network.

4. IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 Youth Participation in EMS Decision Making Processes

There is a need for young people to participate in decision making processes in EMS governing bodies, project planning, finances and in the bodies of EMS members. To secure continuity and sustainability in its work, it is important for churches and mission societies to encourage the furtherance of competent young talent on all levels. This can best be achieved by providing early opportunities to participate in processes. Young people should be involved in such a way that their interests, views and ideas are taken into consideration.

EMS members shall be encouraged to send more young delegates and brief youth delegates on effective participation. Appointments must take into consideration regional and gender balances while granting all young people an equal opportunity for being considered.

4.2 Youth and Communication

Communication is the key to maintaining a bond of fellowship and fostering participation in any group. EMS needs to keep the youth informed about its activities and developments. As structures differ between

churches and mission societies, the Secretariat shall find various approaches of effectively reaching the youth in different contexts. The International Youth Network shall support the Secretariat to find appropriate ways of communication.

The communication tools of EMS shall be adapted to the communication needs and habits of young people. Interactive digital platforms and social media shall be used as effective forms of communication among young people.

With regard to content, EMS media shall post regular reports about youth-relevant topics and actively include suggestions coming from young people. It is vital to avoid the use of derogatory youth stereotypes in all communications.

4.3 Youth and Ecumenical Dialogue and Exchange

Continuous training, ecumenical education and intercultural learning shall be pursued as a guaranteed means of equipping young people for effective participation as well as ensuring a stronger future for the EMS Fellowship. EMS shall seize any available opportunity to give more young people openings for actively participating in its life and work. Young people should be appropriately involved in all training programmes.

To enhance the benefit of youth programmes for member churches, it is important to carefully select participants in ecumenical programmes by involving youth leaders in member churches.

4.4 Youth and EMS Projects and Programmes

In accordance with the EMS Policy for Financial Support for Projects and Programmes, it is important that programmes and projects supported by EMS involve young people as beneficiaries. It is important that a significant proportion of the EMS project portfolio is dedicated to addressing the needs of young people.

When planning EMS projects and programmes, issues of contextual youth interest must be taken into account. EMS bodies shall provide sufficient funding for youth-based projects and activities. Opportunities for funding and collaboration on youth-based projects shall be brought to the attention of young people, the youth network and youth groups of the EMS member churches and mission societies. EMS Secretariat shall assist the International Youth Network in addressing their needs through projects and programmes.

As a general principle EMS must foster “self-reliance by affirming people and empowering them to tackle questions and develop problem solutions in their own life situations from their own resources” (EMS Policy on Financial Support for Projects and Programmes).

The EMS Youth Policy is supplemented by the following documents which are available from the Secretariat:

- Questionnaires on including youth in all fields of activities

For Additional Information

- NOW IS THE TIME TO ACT! Conference Message. EMS Jubilee Theological Conference. 13- 17 September 2021, Akropong, Ghana

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