

Conversations at Catharina's Table



On the way to celebrate women's leadership and participation in the on-going reformation (five hundred years of Lutheran reformation of the church, 1517-2017) - "Women on the Move: From Wittenberg to Windhoek" – WMWW proposes a new activity: **Conversations at Catharina's table**. The main emphasis of this event is sharing ideas, discussions, innovative proposals and also food around a table. Eating together at the table reminds us that women are moving from the act of "serving at the table" to "participating at the table".

The source of this idea comes from the church women in Germany, who call it "Frauenmahl" (*women's dinner*). They have made of these gatherings a unique opportunity to discuss meaningful topics and to create a space for conviviality among women. For more details, visit http://www.evliks.de/leben_und_glauben/kirche_und_welt/23299.html (in German).

The distinctiveness of this event will be that women are united around a table, as a space created for women from different contexts to come together to hear and discuss women's experiences as they take part in the act of eating, listening, sharing and reforming our communities, our churches and societies and ourselves.

LWF WICAS suggests that as many women's groups as possible try to organize their first Conversation using this methodology **around the 31 October 2015 to mark the Reformation Day**. However this is a suitable initiative for any time of the year!

Methodology:

1) The space: where to organize it?

At Catharina's Table, women from different backgrounds gather around the table and share food and conversation on "**women in leadership in the church**".

The space can be organized immediately after the Sunday worship or in a separate moment. The moment should be chosen according to the local context: In some countries breakfast time would be the most appropriate, whereas in others it could be lunch or dinner; or just tea

time; or coffee with biscuits. The participants sit around tables or in small groups, and while eating, engage in conversations.

- Introductory words by the organizer (5 minutes) explaining the methodology and presenting the speaker(s)
- First reflection by the speakers (5-10 minutes)
- First course (about 10 minutes so that people have time to help themselves and eat)
- Discussion around the tables on the topic presented (15 minutes)
- Short interlude of music (one of the participants can sing or play an instrument)- 5 minutes
- Main course (about 15 minutes, so that people have time to help themselves and eat)
- Second reflection by the speaker (5-10 minutes)
- Discussion around the tables on the topic presented (15 minutes)
- Short interlude of music – (5 minutes)
- Dessert (10 minutes so that people have time to help themselves and eat)
- Exchange around the tables on the main topic(s) discussed

2) Who cares for the food?

In most contexts bringing food to church gatherings is a common request. Ask during the announcements at church that those willing to participate bring a dish. Make sure that you have an idea before-hand of who will bring what so that your potluck is varied and sufficient for the group.

3) Setting the table: how to do it?

The table or the space should be arranged with some flowers and decorations, respecting the typical cultural arrangements for informal table setting.

If possible, arrange to alternate food and speech– serving one type of food, and then having a speech, followed by conversations in small groups, around the table, or just in circles.

The presentations can be delivered at the table at different intervals; the time should be used according to the local customs and possibilities (a maximum of 2 hours in total would be advisable). Different courses will be served during the meal and it can be used to structure the sessions.

← The structure in the left lilac box is meant to serve as a suggestion. Please feel free to adapt it or to simplify it as needed and appropriate to your own congregation or women's group.

The conversations are motivated by inputs brought by the women speakers. Two or three speakers representing different constituencies initiate the conversation by providing initial input. The speakers can consist of influential women

from the church (theologian/ordained/ lay leader), as well as from women in politics and business, arts and sciences.

Each speech should last a maximum of 10 minutes, be provocative, able to open up discussions, inviting for sharing and building new proposals.

4) Conversations: what are the issues to be discussed?

Speakers are asked beforehand to prepare specific issues related to women in leadership; they can bring memories of women from different spheres of life: grassroots lay, ordained, theologians, formal educators, pastors, disciples, deaconesses. It is expected that they open up a safe space to discuss important themes of relevance to women's life and witness in the church and world at large.

Ways to initiate the "Conversation at Catharina's table":

- Special women's fellowship meetings can be used to organise it in a local church.
- Women's story(ies) can be part of the liturgy of Sunday worship.
- Make use of cultural resources, like songs written by women, oral or written stories by both women and men, to remember the life and the ministry of the women in your community(ies). The oral stories from women in your church/ community can give life to the women's her-history and they need to be documented.
- At the Catharina's table a welcoming place can be created for the younger members (Sunday school, junior bible school, and youth group) from your community(ies) to hear and participate in the discussion. This will also encourage women with young children to attend.

5) Document it, take notes, or record, if possible the main discussions and take pictures

Photos and notes from this experience are very important. Someone should be appointed to be responsible for the documentation. Stories are going to be published at LWF- WICAS website to encourage more women's groups and congregations to adopt this methodology.

6) Share it

- With the church news
- In a newspaper in the city (if possible)
- With LWF WICAS

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