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European Forum of National Laity Committees (ELF)

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The European Forum of National Lay Committees (the European Laity Forum, ELF) is a Catholic not-for-profit association gathering national lay committees and councils in Europe recognised by their Bishops' conference. The Forum was founded in 1965 encouraged by statements of the Second Vatican Council on the concept of the laity in the Church.

ELF is a platform dedicated to promote collaboration and exchange between its members. ELF also contributes to raising awareness about the mission of the Church in the world and its pastoral work.

The European Forum of National Lay Committees aims to support and help develop the Christian vocation in Europe.

The ELF does not defend any one model of lay Christian vocation but recognises the diversity of lay pastoral work incarnating the European motto "unity in diversity".

To achieve its aim, the ELF

- organises study meetings biennially in one of the member countries;
- explores pastoral and socio-political topics together with invited experts;

- pursues reciprocal exchange of experiences and information on matters of European interest between the members of the Forum;
- promotes and develops regular contacts between national Catholic Lay Committees and councils in Europe;
- promotes interaction and dialogue with the European structures of Bishops' conferences (CCEE and COMECE);
- promotes interaction and dialogue between the Catholic Church organisations at European level and the Pontifical Council for the Laity;
- stimulates exchanges with churches and organisations of other Christian traditions and ecumenical movements.

The ELF's principles include:

- openness and respect based on Christian values;
- a willingness to learn from all members;
- providing opportunities for expressing various points of view;
- providing channels for participation, exchange, mutual support and contact.

History

The first European Congress of the lay apostolate took place in 1960 in Copenhagen. The Steering Committee of the Congress was asked to make suggestions for contacts between lay representatives in the European countries with the aim of strengthening the European consciousness about the role of lay people in the Church.

Five years later, in 1965 during the preparation of the 3rd World Lay Congress in St. Pölten, Austria, the idea of a "European Forum of National Lay Committees" was born. The earlier idea of organising study assemblies in different member states to allow exchanges on relevant topics for lay people was developed.

A first Study Assembly took place in 1970 in Innsbruck, Austria, followed by Study Assemblies every two years. The latest took place in June 2016 in Maynooth, Ireland on the theme "Our lay vocation: being merciful to each other!"

In 2011 the ELF took a further step in its development through the creation and establishment of a non-profit association, ELF e.V., registered as the civil institution of the Forum.