



News Story

40 Tons of Sand in Church Interior

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40 Tons of Sand in Church Interior

“Youth Church is a place to go with your friends in tow, where there’s plenty of spaced-out action and partying”

By Hubert Hecker (English translation by chancel_screen)

(kreuz.net, Limburg) In the diocese of Limburg three so-called youth churches were established last year. The city of Limburg-on-Lahn is situated in the German Federal State of Hessa, approx. 50 km north-west of Frankfurt am Main. The specialist youth-church supervisory board promoted the idea in early 2005 with the following pamphlet: “Youth Church is a place where you go with your friends in tow, where there’s plenty of spaced-out action and partying. There’s skating, spraying, late-night dancing and partying, theatre, musical and band performances, Hip-Hop-Mass, chilling out … the prize for thinking up the coolest name is reason enough for joining in.”

The coolest name for the Limburg youth church proved to be “cross over”. “Cross over to just any side you want”, that’s the message in this church.

Right from the start of the project the adolescents were instructed to desecrate the church. In particular, the kneelers and tabernacle were removed and the sanctum stored in a small adjacent room now designated the “Room of Tranquillity”. The organisers are at pains to see that all activities of the youth church take place in the church itself. The gatherings are organised along the lines of interactive advertising and commercial events.

Breakdance and HipHop are performed using professional light effects and sound system. Musicals and

film evenings are also on the program.

The events at the Oberhausen Youth Church are legendary, among them the skater project, the high-rope course or the desert and beach events with 40 tons of sand in the interior of the church. “Get your kicks”, is the motto of the current half-yearly “cross-over” program.

The town of Oberhausen is located just under 200 km north of Frankfurt and is part of the diocese of Essen. It was in Oberhausen that the first-ever German youth church was set up some 5 years ago. The youth churches in the diocese of Limburg aligned themselves with the Oberhausen concept. It is evident that the youth churches want to compete with the professional leisure industry by using forms similar to those of advertisers in order to lure young people away from the youth industry.

Even Bishop Kamphaus was made to put in an appearance at the youth church in Wiesbaden. After Mass featuring sacro-pop and light show he relaxed in the chill-out area of the church. The youth chaplains justify this ingratiation with the prevailing spirit of commercialism by claiming it to be “authentic youth culture”.

“Kick off” in the Youth Church at Wiesbaden: After Mass featuring sacro-pop and light show he relaxed in the chill-out area of the church.

A number of young people are really into this kind of trashy modern event. “It’s mega fun”, raves Alina (14), and Alexandra agrees with her. “It really is something else here.” The drum-beating promoters from the Wiesbaden Youth Church have also heard critical voices. “Break-dance and disco lights are the last things I want at church“, Max declares in disgust. “The Church must remain authentic and not become a party venue“, is the demand made repeatedly by Wiesbaden students.

The would-be streetwise clerics won’t be dissuaded by such critical voices. After all, they have progressive educationalists on their side. Their theory goes something like this: “Interactive educational methods, activity-oriented identification and movement-intensive programs take effect on the interpretative framework of adolescents via emotions and train soft skills by applying the basic concepts of youth ministry in a high-density environment”, (Cross-Over Concept p. 10ff.).

A Confirmation group takes up the Youth Church offer on the topic of “Faith in God”.

The 40 adolescents gather round the altar, before which a rope-ladder is suspended. The youth chaplain lights a camp fire in a stone vase and tells – “just as the Bedouins used to” – the story of Jacob’s dream and the heavenly ladder. The group now sets about the task of sawing polystyrene rungs for the heavenly ladder (activity-oriented), subsequently painting them in bright colours (emotional-aesthetic cultivation) and finally joining the rungs together to form a ladder (soft-skill team ability etc.).

All handicraft activities take place within the church. Afterwards, the rope ladder is hung up in an adjoining room. There is neither catechism nor exegesis of the relevant passage in Scripture. Imparting knowledge of the Bible and of the teachings and liturgy of the Church is not an explicit educational goal of the youth churches which can, at best, merely provide adolescents with an opportunity to explore their “inner self” by working with such concepts. Accordingly, it is no surprise to learn that such Masses of an “experimental character” take place only every two to four weeks, although their proponents boast of them being the “liturgical pulse” which supposedly forms the “golden thread running through the project”.

The actual guiding principle of the youth churches is the concept self-realization. This has been the real golden thread running through the youth ministry since the Synod of Wuerzburg and now fraying at the edges in the youth churches. This concept stands in stark contrast to the youth ministry proposed at World Youth Day.

The youth church proponents claim that self-realization manifests itself in “love” and “fun”. Under the motto, “no love, no fun” the Limburg Youth Church is running an orientation workshop for students about to graduate.

“If you think the Mass is just the Mass, then come round and check us out”, proclaims the Oberhausen Youth Church. The Frankfurt Youth Church runs the project “Jona in love”. “Erotica”, a musical set in a red-light district, was performed in a youth church hall on 12th February. The musical is a production stemming from the theatre group at Oberhausen Youth Church. This superficial love-philosophy also stands in sharp contradiction to Christian teaching as formulated by Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical ‘Deus caritas est’ (Chapters 5,6,7).

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