

Martina Viktorie Kopecká appointed president of Meeting Brno, a “festival of reconciliation”

The charismatic Hussite minister, Martina Viktorie Kopecká, a member of the Geneva leadership of the World Council of Churches, who at the invitation of Pope Francis is the only ordained woman to have attended the Synod of Bishops in the Vatican, is taking over the leadership of the “festival of reconciliation”, Meeting Brno.

“My service as the chair of the World Council of Churches Youth Commission takes me to places marked by suffering, division and open conflict: from Columbia to refugee camps in Jordan to the demilitarised zone between North and South Korea. In the Meeting Brno festival, which, as a fruit of the 2015 Czech-German Year of Reconciliation develops intercultural, ecumenical and interfaith dialogue in novel ways, I have found since my first involvement last year a platform that our country needs at this time. The Brno method of reconciliation, based on journeying together and making new contact with the old traumas of history, is exceptionally inspiring internationally as well as closer to home, for instance, in North Bohemia,” says the native of Louny, a place where the Hussite faith is still strong. A small town near Ústí nad Labem, Louny is located close to where the Postoloprty massacre, which remains a painful memory to this day, took place 75 years ago.

Martina Viktorie Kopecká presents topics that Meeting Brno has long addressed, in a roving talk show #husitkatolik alongside David Macek, a founder and vice-president of the festival. The thread that runs through this year’s programme is Václav Havel’s celebrated essay “The Power of the Powerless”, the subject of an exhibition in Italy last year presented as part of Meeting Rimini, which attracted lively interest from an international audience, and was then translated into multiple languages. In 2020, the exhibition about Václav Havel’s living legacy is coming to Meeting Brno in May and, in June, to the Wallenstein Garden, the site of the Czech parliament’s Senate, in order to, in Havel’s own words, invite the apparently unshakeable powers to “live in truth”.

A minister of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, Martina Viktorie Kopecká is noted for highlighting the spiritual dimensions of the everyday. She is a patron of the “yourchance” association, a Czech leader in teaching personal finance and in helping young people from children’s homes take their first steps towards independent life. Her bestselling book, *Great Women from a Small Country*, ranks her among the 33 most important Czech women, and she is also an ambassador of *For All the Women*, supporting women in senior business positions.

Taking place this year from 22 to 31 May, this is the fifth season of Meeting Brno. The festival emerged from the “Year of Reconciliation”, launched in 2015 by Petr Kalousek, who remains the festival’s director. At that time, the city of Brno officially expressed regret over the “wild expulsion” of its German-speaking populace: “We express our wish that all past grievances may be forgiven, and that we may, unencumbered by the past and in mutual cooperation, look forward to a shared future” (*Declaration of reconciliation*

and a shared future, Brno 2015). One of the most distinctive moments in the festival's history was the meeting of 110 members of what were originally prominent Brno families – the Tugendhats, Löw-Beers and Stiasnis – that opened a new chapter of the cooperation.

Beyond the Havel-inspired exhibition “The Power of the Powerless”, 2020 will offer a meeting at the Arnold Villa – where some of the Tugendhats and Löw-Beers once lived – as well as programmes at the Mendel Greenhouse where the first discoveries in genetics were made, and at the Documentary Centre of the Holocaust in Moravia, a major project by the writer, Martin Reiner. The festival will climax in a screening of *Schindler's List* in Brněnec itself, at the premises of Schindler's former factory, where Daniel Low-Beer and his foundation are building a substantial memorial.

