

Coordinator's Report

Eighth Consultation of the European Network of Health Care Chaplaincy

Dublin, Ireland

1st –5th of September 2004

A little more than two years have past since the last Consultation of the ENHCC took place in Turku, Finland. Now that we are together again, it seems that the span of time between Turku and Dublin has been short. For the few here today who have been involved in the development of the Network since 1990, when the First European Consultation took place in Berlin, I am sure that the span of time since then seems even shorter.

For it was then, under the inspiration of the Reverend Sten Lundgren, who was at that time, Secretary for Hospital Chaplaincy in the Commission on Congregational Life in the Church of Sweden, that eleven chaplains from Europe met together for the first time. Since then, every two years consultations have been held in Europe to discuss various aspects of chaplaincy. Each time representatives of the European Chaplaincies consulted, it became apparent that all the Chaplaincies represented were dealing with common issues and difficulties within a Europe that was becoming unified. But could the Chaplaincies of Europe unite? This formed the main theme of the historical Sixth Consultation that took place at the Orthodox Academy on the island of Crete, Greece, in November of 2000. It was here that the “*European Network of Healthcare Chaplaincy*” was officially formed. As the Cretan Declaration states the Network consists of representatives from Churches, Faiths and National Associations of Europe. Its purpose is to *enable* its participants, who serve in the area of the multi-disciplinary field of healthcare:

- to *share and learn* from one another
- to work for the *development* of professional guidelines required to minister to the existential and spiritual needs of patients, relatives and staff, drawing on personal, religious, cultural and community resources.
- to *promote* a high quality standard of Health Care Chaplaincy in Europe.

The participants of the Cretan Consultation were well aware that there was a need for a common language which could serve as a basis for ecumenical, academic and professional dialogue amongst the represented Faiths, denominations and associations, a tool that could provide for the common understanding of the role of the health care chaplain amongst the national Chaplaincies so as to allow for the development of the professional guidelines and promotion of “high quality” care. To meet these needs, the participants of the Consultation in Crete agreed that at the next consultation the standards for health care chaplaincy in Europe needed to be adopted. So it is that 40 representatives from 21 nations and 33 different chaplaincy organizations came together in Turku, Finland, for what turned out to be one of the most historic meetings of Chaplaincy in Europe. It was during this consultation that the Standards of Health Care Chaplaincy in Europe were approved. It is noteworthy to mention that the Standards have been translated into 13 languages, making them accessible to most of all of Europe (see www.eurochaplains.org/turku_standards.htm)!

The Consultation in Turku was historical for another reason. In order for the Network to function and grow, there was a need for an administrative structure. Up until this time, the Network did not have any type of “official” administrative body other than a committee that had been designated for the writing of the first draft of the Standards Document. At the conclusion of the Turku Consultation the first official Network Committee was appointed, consisting of a Coordinator and a Network Committee, without designating their responsibilities. The members of the Network Committee were:

- Rev. Kirsti Aalto (Finland)
- Rev. Michael Moeller-Herr (Germany)
- Chaplain Kathleen O’Connor (Ireland)
- Roel Hekking (The Netherlands)
- Rev. Fred Coutts (Scotland)
- Chaplain Marlene Inauen (Switzerland) (alternative member)

Before leaving Turku, we were able to hold a very short committee meeting. The only thing reconfirmed was that the Conference of Health Care Chaplaincy in the Protestant Church of Germany (EKD) would host the next consultation, most likely in Berlin. This had been decided on by the last plenary session at the conclusion of the Turku Consultation. It was decided that the committee should meet in a year to examine the progress of the Network.

When I returned home after the Turku Consultation, being appointed as the first coordinator of the ENHCC, I suddenly realized that I had been placed in front of a wide-open field in which roads and avenues had to be mapped out, aligned and paved in order for the Network to fulfil its primary aim. The only tools available were the good intentions and support of all the representatives, the excellent working relationships of the Network Committee and the Website, which was first created at the conclusion of the Cretan Consultation.

The most useful of these tools was and remains to be the website (www.eurochaplains.org). At the conclusion of the Cretan Consultation in 2000, a modest man with a gentle voice proposed that a website be established, offering to take on the responsibility of its creation. This was the voice of Rev. Fred Coutts, who since then has served as our Webmaster. As he himself wrote in the *Scottish Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy*, the website proved to solve many problems in communication. It “fixed a central reference in the absence of any formal administrative structure, proving instrumental in defining the identity of the Network” as a community of chaplaincies.”¹ In leaving Turku, Fred and I agreed that we needed to develop the site even more so that it could be a source of reference and a useful tool, not only for those in Europe, but also for those beyond. The news column was added, the yahoo group was formed and many links to other chaplaincy and healthcare websites have been made. The results of our efforts are that we now have contact with chaplains throughout the Europe and as far away as the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. I cannot even begin to count the emails Fred and I have exchanged over the past two years in order to iron out the communication problems of the Network and to establish lines of communication with those who take part in it. It does not seem enough to just thank Rev. Fred Coutts for the countless hours he has devoted to the ENHCC, for his creativity, his sensitivity, his dedication and, most of all, for his true friendship throughout the development of the Network. Without his presence and the website he created, the Network would never have reached the scope it has and I personally would have never being able to serve the Network as its Coordinator in a

¹ Fred Coutts, “The European Network of Health Care Chaplaincy: an exercise in building virtual community”, *Scottish Journal of Healthcare Chaplaincy*, Vol.5: 2 2002, p, 31.

responsible fashion. Here, I must add that the cost of the website is (€60) per year, all of which has been met by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.²

If I can describe my term as Coordinator of the Network in one sentence, I can say that it was two full years of writing a lot of letters! At the conclusion of the last Consultation in Turku, the Network was not really known, as much recognized, by other equivalent organizations. Neither was it really clear which chaplaincies that had taken part in previous consultations had officially accepted the Network and the newly adopted Standards. Since Turku, “official” relations have been established with

1. American Association of Professional Chaplains,
2. The National Association of Catholic Chaplains,
3. The Conference of European Churches (CEC)
4. The Commission of Church and Society of the CEC
5. The Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care
6. The European Continental Coordinator of Catholic Chaplains
7. The New Zealand Healthcare Chaplains' Association

In addition to these contacts, the Standards Document was published in the international journal *Christian Bioethics*, where I also was asked to write a paper on the difficulties of health care chaplaincy in relation to ecumenicity from an Orthodox Christian perspective and, in which, I brought attention to the ENHCC. The American Association of Professional Chaplaincy invited the ENHCC to take part in their first joint conference that took place in Canada in February of 2003. Attending the conference and representing the Network was Rev. Michael Moeller-Herr (Germany), who was then a member of the Network Committee. I was also asked to take part in the Conference on Spirituality and Health Care that took place in Aberdeen, Scotland, at which I presented a paper on *Different Dimensions of Spirituality in European Health Care Chaplaincy*, again using the Network as a prime example. Perhaps the greatest achievement was that Dr. Orlo Strunk, managing editor of the well-known *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counselling*, asked that I write the guest editorial for the Spring/Summer 2004 volume of this important publication describing the Network, including the Standards, and the prospects of our future. It is noteworthy that the JPCC has 9000 subscribers all over the world!

In order for the Network to gain its “official status” throughout Europe, efforts were made to send greetings on behalf of all the Chaplaincies represented to special events that took place relative to our calling. Special greetings were sent and read at the *CEC Conference on Bioethics held in France*. (A written copy of the coordinator’s greeting was also given to all the participants.) Greetings were also sent and read at the *International Conference of the Pontifical Council of Health Care in Rome*. In addition to this, greetings were sent to national conferences related to health care chaplaincy in *Finland, Bulgaria, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway and, recently, to the Nordic Conference*. Special greetings were also sent to the Churches of Scotland, Sweden and Switzerland for the election of their new leaders.

In an effort to help representatives support their own efforts in promoting united chaplaincy as expressed in the Network, letters were sent to Chaplaincies that posed particular hesitancy in accepting the concept of the Network.

² The presence and not only financial support of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Director of its Hospital Chaplaincy, Kirsti Aalto, throughout the history of the Network has been decisive for its progress.

Allow me to say that one of the most difficult aspects of coordinating has not been investing the time and energy in communicating and struggling to establish communication and develop professional and interpersonal relationships amongst chaplains and chaplaincies. The most difficult aspect of coordinating is when you write and try hard to reach out and *there is no response at all!*

There were also some difficult times and setbacks over the past two years. In less than one year's time from our parting in Turku, two members of the Network Committee resigned, Rev. Michael Moeller-Herr (Germany) and Roel Hekking (The Netherlands) because they left their Chaplaincies. After their change in status, it was very difficult to even make contact with them. This was a major shake-up because Michael had taken on the responsibility of organizing the Eighth Consultation in Germany. After initially accepting to host the next consultation, his conference declined their invitation, leaving us without a place to go. So, ***our first crisis was an inner one and a test to see how strong the Network really was.*** After many deliberations by phone and email, it was decided that Marlene Inauen of Switzerland and Rev. Edward Lewis of England would take the place of the two members that resigned. In addition, Rev. Kathrin Jahns of Germany (who was assigned to take Michael's place by her Conference) was appointed as an alternate member. (The main reason for this was that it was felt that she needed to get to know the Network better before taking on a position as a full committee member.) This crisis showed us all that there was a great need for a firmer administration of the Network. Finally, after the gracious offer of Kathleen O' Conner to serve as organizer of the Eighth Consultation, it was decided that it would take place in Dublin, Ireland.

Allow me at this point to thank Kathleen for *literally saving* the Network by offering to host this Consultation and for all the energy she gave in organizing what, I am sure, will be a productive meeting. I would also like to thank Fr. Bryan Nolan, Fr. Brian Gough who flanked Kathleen, together with Danielle Brown, on the organizing committee. Besides all the practicalities of organizing this event, Kathleen took us another step forward in arranging for the President of Ireland to officially open our meeting. This is indeed a great achievement!

Being that the Consultation was to meet in Dublin, it was decided that our annual committee meeting would take place here. Kirsti Aalto, Fred Coutts, Kathrin Jahns, Kathleen O' Conner and myself met here in Dublin last September. Marlene Inauen and Fr. Edward Lewis were not able to attend. For three days and nights (!) we worked hard at sorting out the names of representatives, discussing the theme of this Consultation, writing the draft of the Constitution that will be discussed, and foremost, bonding our friendship! At the conclusion of this meeting, I felt sure that we now were forming a well-founded and solid organization.

Lastly, the finances of the Network must be mentioned. I will not go into detail here, as this will be discussed during our proceedings. Allow me only to say that all that has been done has been done with very few funds. Special thanks must be given to Fr. Edward Lewis for all his efforts and his willingness to find contributions to the Network. Fr. Edward's support and encouragement has meant a great deal. Thanks must be given to the participants of Switzerland, Sweden, Scotland, Finland and foremost Ireland for their contributions. In order for participants with financial difficulties to attend this Consultation, a sponsorship fund was founded. Contributing to this fund were the Chaplaincies of England, Ireland, Scotland, Finland and a small group of individuals from the USA, headed by Rev. George Burns.

Over the past two years, day after day, I have asked myself the same questions which I posed in my first letter to all of you after the Turku Consolation: How can our Network witness and challenge

others, on all levels, to express the love and offer the care so much needed in the world we live? How can we support one another in our ministry? How can we assist our religious leaders and our health systems to recognize the importance of the spiritual and existential aspects of illness and the need for more responsible pastoral healthcare? The answers to these vital questions must be answered in a collective and a constructive way. This, the Eighth Consultation of the Chaplaincies of Europe, hopefully will begin to answer these questions in a practical way. We, though, must always keep in mind that whatever decisions we make here and whatever directions we take must be rooted in the sole purpose of having God's philanthropic love manifested in all and through all.

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