



EUROPEAN NETWORK OF HEALTH CARE CHAPLAINCY
ANNIVERSARY CONSULTATION
20 YEARS OF EUROPEAN CHAPLAINCY
10 YEARS OF ENHCC
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“Chaplains in the future – giving and receiving”

Coordinator’s Report

*“As you set out for Ithaka
hope the voyage is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.
Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
angry Poseidon – don’t be afraid of them:
you’ll never find things like that on your way
as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,
as long as a rare excitement
stirs your spirit and your body.
Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
wild Poseidon – you won’t encounter them
unless you bring them along inside your soul,
unless your soul sets them up in front of you.*

*Hope the voyage is a long one.
May there be many a summer morning when,
with what pleasure, what joy,
you come into harbors seen for the first time;
may you stop at Phoenician trading stations*

*to buy fine things,
mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
sensual perfume of every kind—
as many sensual perfumes as you can;
and may you visit many Egyptian cities
to gather stores of knowledge from their scholars.*

*Keep Ithaka always in your mind.
Arriving there is what you are destined for.
But do not hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for years,
so you are old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you have gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.*

*Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her you would not have set out.
She has nothing left to give you now.*

*And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
you will have understood by then what these Ithakas mean."*

This poem, by the great Greek poet of Alexandria, Constantine Cavafy, seems most appropriate as we start our Anniversary Consultation celebrating 20 years of European Chaplaincy and ten years since the founding of our European Network of Health Care Chaplaincy. The island of Ithaka was the homeland of Odysseus (also known as Ulysses), who sought return to it after the Trojan War. It took him ten years to find his way back.

How fitting! It took ten years for our Network, which has now travelled for ten years, to be founded. The journey started in the Holy Lands when Sten Ludgren was travelling from Sweden. Sten was then head of the Pastoral Office of the Free Church of Sweden, a staunch ecumenist and a sincere pastor, a mentor for many. As he was travelling, he encountered a chaplain from another country. They started to talk about chaplaincy and, seeing how rewarding their exchange of experiences was, they came up with the idea of calling together chaplains from Europe together so that they too could have the same joy of sharing. So it was that the first meeting of representatives from European Chaplaincies gathered in October 1990 in Berlin. After that, meetings followed in Uppsala (1993), in the Netherlands (1994), in Bath, England (1996), and in Rome (1998). There, in Rome, it was decided that the next

consultation be hosted by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 2000 and to take place in Greece.

The journey of European chaplains was rewarding, but the question that was posed in Rome was a serious one: where are we going? For the meetings of European Chaplains seemed to be a journey without a destination.

Parallel to this journey, another journey was taking place, that of the European Union! The 1990s was the decade of rapid steps toward a united Europe. With the collapse of communism across central and Eastern Europe, Europeans become closer neighbours. With the signing of the 'Maastricht' Treaty on European Union in 1992, the dreams of a Common Market materialized, emphasising:

- the strengthen and the democratic legitimacy of European institutions
- the improvement of the effectiveness of European institutions
- the establishment of economic and monetary union
- the development the social dimension of the EU Community
- the establishment of a common foreign and security policy.

In 1995 the EU members implemented the "Schengen Agreement" that gradually allowed people to travel without having their passports checked at the borders. Millions of people were able to open up even more channels of cooperation and communication, made easier, more and more, through the use rapid and continual development of internet and mobile telephones. Thus, Europeans became concerned about how to act together in areas of other common concern, including that of health care. The Treaty of Amsterdam signed in 1997 laid down new principles and responsibilities in the field of the common foreign policy, with the emphasis on projecting the EU's values to the outside world, protecting its interests and reforming its modes of action. It formed a more consolidated structural basis of representation from the Member States so as to plan and implement common strategies.

By the time the 23 representatives from 15 chaplaincies arrived on the island of Crete at the Orthodox Academy for the 6th European Consultation of Hospital Chaplaincy, the socio-political background of Europe had rapidly changed. In the far horizon, with the developments that had taken place in Europe, the journey that the chaplains had begun in 1990 was acquiring a sense of direction. In Crete, it was clear that we were all now part of One United European Community! The question that had to be posed was: could we, should we have a One United Hospital Chaplaincy? It was evident that, if we were going to exist within a European framework, that there was a necessity to have more cooperation between our respective chaplaincies

and a need for a common standard that qualifies what health care chaplaincy was and how it was practiced.

At the onset of the deliberations, the answer to this question seemed rather simple: “Yes!” “Of course!”. It was commonly agreed that the time had come when the Chaplaincies of Europe should come together under some sort of organization. The participants initially felt that there were more things that each shared in common than things that separated them. In fact, some of the national chaplaincies were already “networking” themselves with other national chaplaincies. There were though some initial concerns regarding the formation of a “united” chaplaincy due to the underlying differentiations in the administration of each chaplaincy, its relationship with its Faith group authority and the different perceptions of the meaning of spirituality. The main difficulty was the use of language in defining these differences, particularly within their specific cultural contexts. The greatest clash came in defining chaplaincy within a faith-centred context or in a secular context. Here, our discussion became intense. Until the last hour of deliberations, it seemed as though the journey toward some type of oneness would remain unfulfilled. Laistrygonians and Cyclops, the wild and angry Poseidon had surrounded our ship. Tensions rose, but our thoughts and excitement remained high. Our persistence in maintaining open communication and understanding prevailed. We all knew that unless we bring these tensions along inside our souls, unless our souls set them up in front of us, allowing our differences to polarize us, they will not harm us. We all knew that if chaplaincy was going to survive within the socio-political and religious community of Europe, that we had to reach our Ithaka, an Ithaka of mutual respect, of sharing and learning from one another, an Ithaka of high quality standards for European Chaplaincy, an Ithaka that expresses concern and care for all. On the last day, after much discussion and in the final hour, on Saturday, the 11th of November, it was agreed that the European Network of Health Care Chaplaincy (ENHCC) be formed and the Cretan Declaration was adopted.

In leaving Crete, the only thing that we had agreed on was a name. A small organizing committee was formed made up of myself, Fred Coutts, who offered to set up a website, Michael Möller-Herr of the Lutheran Church of Germany and Kirsti Aalto of the Lutheran Church of Finland, who graciously offered to host the next consultation in 2002. The main task of this working committee was to prepare a draft of the Standards for Health Care Chaplaincy in Europe. Meeting in Constantinople, today’s Istanbul, at the Ecumenical Patriarchate, we collaborated, using what we had learned from the Cretan Consultation to form the draft.

Our meeting in Finland was panegyric! The Standards were adopted, a coordinator was elected, and a network committee was appointed. Dublin, Lisbon and Tartu, Estonia were the sites of the following consultations. During these meetings, a constitution was adopted setting the president for a firm infrastructure,

taking great efforts in explaining and helping other to understand who each of us were on a theological, clinical and cultural level. In Lisbon and Estonia, we began discuss special areas of concern, issuing a statement on palliative care and addressing end of life issue. More important is that each time we met, a strong bond of professional and inter-personal relationships was formed.

From the founding of our Network, great efforts were made in establishing relationships across the Atlantic, with the American Association of Professional Chaplains and with the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (whose representative is attending our Consultation for the first time). We have opened pathways toward the Council of European Churches (CEC), the EU Policy Advisor for Religious Dialogue and with the Office of the EU Commissioner for Public Health, visiting their offices regularly and partaking in several EU dialogue meetings. In fact, it was because of our initiative that a special meeting was called by the office of the EU Commissioner on palliative care.

As in Homer writes in the Odyssey about the journey to Ithaka, “Many cities did [we] visit, and many were the nations with whose manners and customs [we were] acquainted...”

Throughout these ten years, those that have been elected to serve the Network Committee have been in continual communication, meeting once in Dublin, once in Leuven and three times at the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople. Without the cooperation and dedication of those that served the Network Committee, we would have never progressed as we did. Here, I must underline the work done by Rev. Fred Coutts, our webmaster, who created and developed our website, making it a point of reference for us all. I can honestly say that without Fred’s energetic effort and absolute commitment, our Network would have never progressed in its course of travel.

After ten years of journeying, our Network has reached a peak, or I should say a plateau, in our history. Over the past two years, some firm steps were made. One was that we established a dialogue with the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care. This is important in that some 15 national chaplaincies of the Roman Catholic Church have participated in the Network. In my meeting with the members of the Council in Rome this past July, it was agreed that health care chaplaincy in Europe is entering a difficult phase due to a more secular understanding of what is termed as “spiritual”, the attempt to minimize whatever is religious, particularly whatever is considered ecclesiastical. The Pontifical Council will assist us to connect with more countries in Eastern Europe, which has been difficult to do in the past, and to work with the *Council of European Bishops' Conferences*, an important body of the Roman Church.

In June of 2009, we met again with the directors The Church and Society Commission (CSC) a commission of the Conference of European Churches (CEC), with the Deputy Secretary of the Office of the EU Commissioner of Public Health and the Policy Advisor for Religious Dialogue in the EU. What became apparent in all of these meetings was the request that we, as a renowned European organization, offer our knowledge and skills so as to enrich those who are concerned with health care in Europe. Instead of asking for recognition from EU officials, we were placed in a position where we were asked to contribute in the “Great Event of European Union”.

Following this request, the Network Committee decided that a small conclusive survey should be done so as to show regarding how end of life issues are dealt with in each of our respective countries and chaplaincies. This was also a good follow-up from our last consultation. This comparative survey would be useful for all of us to learn from one another, while serving as a reference source for the bodies that we have been collaborating with over the past years. The survey was an important trail to test how we truly work together and contribute in a collective way. Unfortunately, this effort failed. Only eleven participating organizational bodies contributed.

The failure of this collective effort raises some basic concerns about the future of our Network. Has our journey to find Ithaca come to a stand-still? Have we lost our sense of motivation? Have we become engulfed in the disenchantment of a United Europe, a disenchantment that pervades our day and time, causing us to retrieve into ourselves?

As stated in the Cretan Declaration that was adopted at the onset of our journey, Our Network was founded on two major factors:

- 1) *a clear understanding of ourselves and how we relate to one another on a theological, cultural, psychological and practical/clinical level*
- 2) *the promotion of a high standard of spiritual health care within our national organizations, in Europe and the world at large*

Over the past ten years as the Network’s Coordinator, it has been my firm belief that the existence of our Network depends on one more important factor: *our ability to contribute to the challenges of health care on all levels by building bridges of communication, forming relations of trust and cooperation and by being a expression of care.*

This last point is the denominator that can give us the incentive to move on. We cannot exist just by inertia, by remaining self-centred and self-confining in our national situations. We are professionals that proclaim the message of hope through care. Thus, our contribution to the challenges of today’s European society and in health care particularly, is not a theoretical or academic one. It is a way of expressing our concern for those that are in need of a care that only we can offer. If we retrieve

into our national situations and do not make efforts in looking at ourselves as part of a whole and expressing care for that whole, we will dwindle, not only as a Network, but as caregivers. Our Journey will come to an end.

We are entering a difficult time in history in which all the institutions and establishments that once offered a sense of stability are being questioned. Well defined social and cultural entities of the past seem to have liquidated. In the name of “multi-culturalism” and “multi faithism”, all seem to be one, but there appears that we have lost the “One”, that there is not a “Someone” outside our selves that keeps us together. This poses a new challenge to chaplaincy organizations to work together: to help people, in these troubled times, to regain their faith in a Philanthropic God and to learn how to except genuine care. For, as Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew told us when we met with him, our mission is to be a living expression of God’s Philanthropy. It is a mission that *does not know geographical boundaries, does not distinguish race, people or language, is directed indiscriminately and without exception to all men and women, who are created in God’s image.*

So it is that, as at all of our previous gatherings, we are called upon to make this Anniversary meeting a historical one. A new coordinator will be elected, as my term is ending. In these coming days, we will have to seriously discuss how our journey will progress in the sea in which we are sailing in a time of history that that is encountering many storms. In examining who the chaplain of the future will be, we must also define how the chaplain can be a vessel of care, an example of how one can give and receive. In doing this, we must also examine how our Network can also a better vessel of care. How we can find better ways in giving to on another and receiving and accepting one another on a personal and cross-national level? As in Crete ten years ago and all our following consultations, I am sure that if we will keep Ithica in our mind, we will continue in our continual goal of networking.

**Fr. Stavros Kofinas,
Coordinator
September 16, 2010
Opening Ceremony
St. Paul’s Cathedral
London**