

Thanks for the naming of
“Father Stavros Kofinas Scholarship Fund”

During the 10 years that I coordinated the Network, each time a Consultation was over I always said that I felt a little bit smaller from receiving the love of the participants and from the greatness of our organization. Today, I feel even more so. I want to thank all of you for the honor that you gave me to serve the Network as its Coordinator over the past years (2000-2010) and for naming this scholarship fund in my name.

Since its founding, our Network has changed in many ways. In organizing our Consultation in Chania, Crete (2000), there was no e-mail or internet to easily communicate with others. Invitations had to be sent by, what Fred Coutts calls, “snail mail”. There was not even a clear list of participants, their addresses and phone numbers. In spite of all these difficulties, the Consultation in Chania took place and we formed “The European Network of Health Care Chaplaincy”. Since that consultation we, as persons and as a Network, have grown and matured in many ways.

Between the Lisbon Consultation and the Estonia Consultation, we had received an e-mail from someone that had seen our website. His message stated that it was his impression that our Network was a meeting of friends and that our Consultations seemed like a social event, reprimanding us that we should be more serious as chaplains. I responded to him that we, as chaplains, must first know how to be friends and to engage on all levels of our existence in order to be true pastors and spiritual health care providers. This sense of friendship as kept our Network together.

Truly, from its beginning, the main characteristics of our Network have been a sense of friendship, passion and enthusiasm on a interpersonal and professional level. I can honestly say that over the past years, many of my dearest and closest friendships have been developed within the Network. This has been the greatest blessing I have received as its Coordinator. For this, I am most grateful. If our Network is to continue, it will do so only if we continue to maintain a sense of friendship between us and to preserve the spirit of passion and enthusiasm for our professional calling as well as our organization.

The Network is a result of a conjoint effort of many persons. My coordination of and the development of this Network would not have been possible without Fred Coutts and the endless efforts and work he gave in assisting me and forming our website. He has become a dear friend. I ask that we thank him again for his work.

I also would like to thank Kirsti Aalto who, through the years, supported me and the Network with her guidance and companionship. I would like to ask the delegation from Finland to relay my thanks and our greeting to her upon their return.

Together with Fred and Kirsti, I would like to thank all those that served on the Network Committees throughout these years, particularly those that organized the consultations. Organizing a Consultation is not an easy task. I remember that after our consultation in Finland, the country that had offered to host the next consultation informed me that they were not able to go through with their plans. Thank God Kathleen O'Connor from Dublin took the initiative of taking on that responsibility. We would not be here today if she had not done so. Therefore, I thank Kirsti Aalto (Finland), Kathleen O'Conner (Ireland) Fr. Nuno (Portugal), Naathan Haamer (Estonia), Debbie Hodge and Fr. Edward Lewis (England), for their energetic efforts in organizing the past Consultations. I also would like to thank all those of the Netherlands for all they did to make this, the 12th Consultation, successful.

I must add that Naathan has kept the memories of our Consultation alive and vivid throughout these years by way of his archive of photographs. He is a true friend to me and to all the participants of the Network.

In addition to these persons, I would especially like to thank Anneke Kemper of the Netherlands and Fr. Adamantios Avgoustides of the Church of Greece, for their support and friendship. Anneke has served on the Network Committee and we have been in close contact regarding Network affairs since Dublin. Fr. Adamatios has traveled with me to all the Consultations and has been a valuable confidant.

Dear Anne (Vandenhoeck), in Dublin I nominated you to be on the Network Committee and in England I had the honor in nominating you to be Coordinator of our Network. Throughout these years, you have been a good friend and a great support to me while I was Coordinator. We have shared many experiences together. I congratulate you on your first two years of service and I am sure that you will continue to lead the Network so that it will continue to grow as it has grown over the past years.

Before coming to the Netherlands, Fred and I were wondering how it will be not having any organizational responsibilities at this Consultation after so many years of being at the head. We said we would sit in the back of the room and observe. Throughout this Consultation, we indeed did sit in the back of the room where I observed, with great satisfaction, that what we have worked for over the past years is continuing with success and is growing in spirit. I am sure that this will continue. I would like to add that I am at the Network's service for whatever is needed of me.

In closing I would like to add a final remark. After the meeting for palliative care that I, on behalf of the ENHCC, helped organize with the Office of the Commissioner for Public Health of the EU, I was standing opposite the Commission building at the bus stop way to the airport with one of the directors of WHO (the World Health Organization). As we were gazing at the glass building of the EU in front of us, the director of WHO turned to me and said, "One day this building will be an empty shell. The EU will not exist". I

looked at him a bit surprised, but our dialogue ended with the arrival of my bus.

After many years, I realize what he meant. We are now at the crux of the most difficult time of the EU since its founding, as the future of the EU is very shaky and uncertain. One cannot help speculate why Europe has come to this point. IN my mind there is a basic reason. The reality is that the EU cannot be held together only by a common currency. In order for us to stay together as a United Europe, we as Europeans need a strong sense of identity and a sense of values that are based on the Faith and on the cultures that have been part of our history for centuries. Without this sense of identity, a sense of values and this Faith, Europe surely cannot stand as a united continent.

We as chaplains are in a position to proclaim this message, to remind our people that our only salvation as a United Europe is based on our faith in God, on a love for human life and a respect each person's dignity and the values that formed the core of our cultures. We, as the Disciples of our Lord , seem to be only a few, but it was only a few that changed the world. For "a little yeast ferments the whole lump of dough" (1 Cor 5:6). We too, through our ministry and the care we provide to all, can help change Europe's direction.

I humbly thank you again for your love and the honor you have bestowed upon me.

Fr. Stavros Kofinas
12th Consultation of the ENHCC
Mennorode, Netherlands