

**The Tenth Consultation
of the
European Network of Health Care Chaplaincy
Coordinator's Report
Tartu, Estonia
May 28, 2008**

Where has time flown by? It seems that we just left Lisbon two years ago, and for some of us, it seems like yesterday that we gathered in Crete in the year 2000 to discuss the “making” of our *European Network of Health Care Chaplaincy*. Even more, for a very few here, October of 1990 I am sure most seem like a week ago. For it was then that our beloved Sten Ludgren, who we are honored to have with us today, gathered hospital chaplains from various European countries to talk about the critical ethical issues facing health care professionals. So, we are approaching 18 years of consulting one another about vital issues regarding health care chaplaincy and eight years since the organization of the ENHCC. In two more years, God willing, we will be hitting an even greater celebration: 20 years of consultations and the 10th birthday of the *European Network of Health Care Chaplaincy*.

I am not saying all of this to be sentimental. This significant meeting in Tartu will be decisive in determining the future of our Network. The fact that in two years we will reach a hallmark in our history means that we, here in Tartu, are approaching a tuning point in the future of our organization. If we do not begin discussing this reality, then our next meeting will be anticlimactic, not fitful for a real celebration.

Over the past two years, some major steps took place that are worth noting. The first is that we, as a Network, within the realm of the governmental aspect of the European Union, became more engaged in what is going on in Brussels. I, as coordinator, took part in a special “*dialogue seminar*” in October of 2006 concerning

the “*Community action on health services*”. Our Dana Kalnina-Zake from Latvia was there as well, representing her church. The Seminar was jointly organized by the EU, CEC, the COMESE and Eurodiaconia. At this meeting, there were about representatives from different faith-group organizations that heard EU officials talk about the developments of health services in light of the EU policy on commodity and trade. We must realize that, unfortunately, the EU thinks of things basically within their economic demission, even the complex and delicate aspects of health care. This creates many difficulties in that some of the most important aspects of care are considered less important. Probably, the most beneficial thing gained from this meeting was not the meeting itself, but the interaction with those that attended. I, together with Dana, was able to speak about chaplaincy as the link that brings together the medical world and the established Faiths into what we today call “spiritual health providers”. Personally I believe that our impact was vital and well heard. It was amazing to me how the representatives were not aware of our role as chaplains and the importance of our work. As a result of our participation, we, together with all that attended, were asked to submit our comments and observations on the dialogue, which were placed on the EU’s website. We also were asked to write a description of our organization, which also was placed on the EU’s website (see: <http://www.eurochaplains.org/news.htm#healthservices>).

During our time in Brussels, Dana, Anne Vandenhoeck and myself made a short visit to the two offices that we have visited in the past: the office of the Advisor of Dialogue for Religion (Dr. Winenger) and that of the Director of the Office of the EU Commissioner of Public Health (Mr. Schinas). The meeting with Mr. Schinas was important in that we presented him with the “*Statement on Palliative Care*” was formed at our last consultation (see: <http://www.eapcnet.org/download/forOrganisations/ENHCC/ENHCC-Lisbon2006.pdfthat>). We also made a proposal that he organize a meeting of all the organizations that deal with this on a

European level. This proposal was well received and, as a result, this meeting did indeed take place in June of last year.

Amongst those attending this meeting were Dr. A. Tsouros, Head of the European Office for Public Health and Environment of WHO and EU Parliament member John Bowis of England. Mr. Bowis is considered one of the most influential parliament members in social issues. Unfortunately though, this meeting was not as successful as the organizers had hoped. My personal opinion is that it was not really planned as well as it could have been from the Director's office. The European Association for Palliative Care did not come, together with several other organizations that were crucial in mapping further steps in European Palliative Care. I was asked by the office of CEC to represent them as well, which gave some weight on what I had to say. It was agreed that more needed to be done and that a more organized dialogue seminar could be planned for in the future.

Things though changed in Brussels. Both the Policy Advisor for Religious Dialogue, Dr. Weninger, and the Director of the Office of the Commissioner of Public Health, Mr. Schinas, left their positions. Dr. Weninger went back to Austria and Mr. Schinas became a EU Parliament member. This means that the continuity of what was discussed was disrupted.

This leads us to a major difficulty. As in our Network and any other international structure, the turn over of central figure heads creates a difficulty of continuity. That means that our contacts and presence within the structure of the EU must be ongoing and forever present.

Over the past years, we have established an open line of communication with CEC – *the Conference of European Churches* and particularly with its *Commission of Church and Society*. As many of you have seen in our internet downloads, we now receive informative updates on European Affairs issued by CEC. We also are represented in the special committee on bioethics by our representative Kirsti Aalto. Since my meeting with the heads of the Office of the *Commission of Church and Society* during the dialogue seminar in October of 2006, I have been in frequent

communication with them, particularly regarding palliative care. Here in Tartu, we will be honored to have the General Secretary of the *Commission of Church and Society of the Conference of European Churches* Dr. Richard Fischer attend our Consultation. He will present us with an overview of end of life issues in Europe. Dr. Fischer is probably the most qualified in this area.

During our committee meeting, which took place in Lueven this past fall, we met with Reverend Rüdiger Noll, Director of the Commission and Associate General Secretary CEC in Brussels. During our meeting, we informed him about chaplaincy in Europe and discussed how our organization could work closer with the Commission. It was proposed that we become associate members of the Commission, able to take part in meetings of general concern. This has already being established with the European Association of Prison Chaplaincy. My personal opinion is that this is necessary. By doing this, we will be able to keep chaplaincy in the limelight, both on an inter-denominational level and a European level. We can work closer with an established organization such as CEC that works and interrelates with many other European organizations, such as the COMESE and Eurodiakonia. Of course, this does not mean that we will lose our autonomy or our identity. It means that we, being who we are, will be able to open a wider range of communication with others. We will have the resources of being present and informed within the Brussels scene.

Over the past years, we have exerted great efforts in establishing relations on an international level. Other than the EU and CEC, the most significant “relationship” that has been formed is with the *American Association of Professional Chaplains*. I was blessed to attend the APC Conference that took place in San Francisco last April and meet with the Commission on Advocacy. Attending the conference and the session was also our Derek Brown of Scotland. There, European Chaplaincy was presented “in its entire splendor” and was an eye opener to many there who were not aware of what was taking place on the other side of the Atlantic.

Here, in Estonia, we welcome the President of the *American Professional Chaplains*, Mary Whetstone and its Executive Director Jo Schrader. I do not have words to welcome George Burn. George is a member of the Committee of International Advocacy of the APC. George's presence, personal commitment, dedication in sharing, understanding and caring has been monumental and for that, we are most grateful.

The fact that we have established ourselves on a EU and international level was and remains to be necessary, but it is now time that we look at other aspects of ourselves as a Network and as individual chaplaincies. We, as a Network, have a very loose structure. This is one of the difficulties with the European Union as a whole. From the birth of our organization we have been struggling in finding ways in being united but retaining our national, ethnic and religious - ecclesiastical - identity. If our Network though is going to go forward, we need to find more substantial ways in working together and sharing our pastoral experiences. Here, we must remember that sharing is not always agreeing or having the same perspective on things. It is learning and attempting to understand who the other is, trying to find points of meeting and communication.

The theme of this consultation "*From quality to sanctity of human life*" is an attempt to start doing this. It not only touches on the end of life issues which are predominating health care, but it touches on the identity of the chaplain as a bearer of loving grace. We must admit that the identity of chaplaincy and the chaplain is changing in many ways, often to the point of questioning its point of reference. In approaching our theme "*From quality to sanctity of human life*" from a theological, clinical and socio-political perspective, hopefully we will be able to qualify in a more distinct manner our different beliefs, concerns and practical approach to what we do. In doing this, we can help understand who we are.

This is a first real step in finding new ways of understanding each other and working together. There are other themes that are of importance which must concern us in the future, such as the threat of pandemics.

So, I must insist that, if we are going to be a real Network of chaplaincies, we have to find more concrete ways of interacting. We cannot be limited to a consultation that takes place once every two years. I can understand that we are all very busy in our own worlds, but I cannot avoid commenting that sometimes we get lost in our own worlds. When we do this, we will not grow as persons and as a chaplaincy. In the days ahead, we need to think of concrete ways in implementing our goal and purpose as a Network, which is sharing, so that, at our final session, we can come up with concrete ideas.

As you will notice on the program, apart from the worship opportunities for each denomination, as was practiced at our last consultation, there will be two conjoint worship services. The network committee decided that we should follow the prescribed worship of other major ecumenical religious organizations such as the WCC and CEC. But at this Consultation, we would like to start a tradition that hopefully will be continued in our following meetings. We will devote a special service for those that are ill and a special service for those in the health care profession. We must never forget that our major task, as chaplains, lays in prayer and that, without prayer, we are left fully alone in our joys, in our pain and in our difficulties.

Toward the end of the consolation, we will revise two clauses in our constitution. We have sent you this information by email, so I do not need to explain here. We will also be electing members to serve on the network committee. Elected will be four members. I ask that we have this in mind, as to propose the right people for nomination.

I have now saved the most difficult item for last. According to our constitution, the coordinator serves for four years and can serve for another two if the plenary session feels that it is necessary. I have been honored in leading our Network as Coordinator since the Tartu conference in 2002, before the new constitution was implemented. Under the new constitution of 2004, I was re-elected for four more years in Dublin, bringing us to date. Essentially though, I have been at the leading post since the

organization of the Cretan Consultation in 2000 (1998). After much thought and prayers, my initial feeling is that I should step down and that we elect a new Coordinator. As I stated earlier, we are at a turning point in our history. We need fresh blood and new ideas. In October, during our committee meeting in Brussels, I stated my thoughts to the committee members. Then, all the committee members asked that I stay on for two more years. Last night, during our committee meeting, I reiterated my feelings. They again asked that I carry on for two more years so as to prepare the road for a new coordinator. After a long discussion, my answer was that I would accept this as a servant to the Network, only if the participants truly felt wholeheartedly that this was needed. If you decide otherwise, I assure you that I will not be offended in any way. I am only concerned for the future of the Network. Again, I have given this much thought and prayer and I ask that you too do the same, so that at the end of our consultation, you may decide if there is a need to have a new person lead the Network.

Here, for now, I will not say more. We have four days ahead of us. I am sure they will be rewarding. Let us walk ahead!

Rev. Dr. Stavros Kofinas
Coordinator of the European Network of Healthcare Chaplaincy
(Representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate)