

***Greetings to the Deputy Secretary of State to the Minister of Health
of Portugal***

***9th Consultation of the European Network of Health Care Chaplaincy
May 17th-21st 2006
Lisbon, Portugal***

Your Honor,

As Coordinator of the European Network of Health Care Chaplaincy, I would like to welcome you to the opening of our 9th Consultation here in Lisbon. Our European Network is made up of 52 representatives of forty-six official Chaplaincy organizations from 31 European countries. Participating in this consultation are also representatives from international and European organizations involved in pastoral care and special guests from the Association of the American Professional Chaplains. The aim of our Network is to promote and integrate a high quality standard of chaplaincy in healthcare by sharing and learning from one another.

As you know, the theme of our Consultation here in Lisbon is “Building bridges – Growing Hope”. The fact that our Consultation takes place in your beautiful country is very symbolic in relation to our theme. Being on the coast of the Atlantic, Portugal is one of the main ports of Europe. From the time it joined the European Union, the Portuguese people have worked hard in forming a country that is dedicated to developmental growth without losing its human and cultural identity. It provides an example of hope for all nations within Europe. Being that the President of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso is from Portugal, shows how your country has taken a leading role in building bridges amongst all the peoples and nations of Europe.

During our Consultation, we hope to follow Portugal's example. We will not only attempt to build bridges amongst our countries and our chaplaincies on a theological and multicultural level, but we will seek ways in strengthening our relations with the officials of the EU and the medical community, particularly in the area of Palliative Care. Also, here on the Portuguese coast of the Atlantic, we will make efforts in building a sturdy bridge over this great ocean, in order to unite our efforts with chaplaincies in America.

Your Honor,

I am sure that I express all of the participants of our Network in saying that we feel blessed that you have given us the honor in opening our meeting. Your presence here verifies your firm commitment that health care is incomplete without its spiritual dimension, your firm support in the National Chaplaincy Organization of Portugal and our Network's European character. Your presence also gives us hope that all of us in our respective countries will be able to build a bridge of sound communication and dialogue with our local governments and health care provider agencies, forming a joint effort in healing the wounds and ailments of the body and the soul. Our prayers are that God will grant you the endurance and stamina needed to continue in your work and that your country will continue to progress by God's grace in every way.

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

May 18, 2005

