**Chair’s report for 2022-2023**

*Dear Sisters and Brothers, SD-E companions,*

***Looking back***

It is a great pleasure to look back to this last year since we met last time in Iceland. At that time, we came after a very difficult period, thirsting for each other’s presence. The loneliness, frustration and marginalization affected our private life. We were still a bit afraid of contacting Corona virus, but somehow relaxed after our negative tests. After a rather complicated and difficult year, we are again together in the north of our continent. I would like to express my gratitude to our Estonian friends and fellow workers for inviting us here, for working so hard for more than a year in order to see everything excellently prepared for us. Thank you for your warm welcome and love shown toward us.

***Worries***

The war raging in our neighbourhood still affected our lives last year, and it continues as a threat for many valuable human lives. That caused us a few sleepless nights. Slowly it seems that we are accustomed to this abomination (nuisance, mindless destruction). The inflation, the gas and electricity prices caused us worries as well. The globally manifested climate change affects our children, grandchildren and us. Among the many threatening news and realities, we read the Word and promise of our Lord, who comforts us: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20b), and respectively he encourages us: „Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27). Why would he told this to his disciples, if they weren’t troubled and afraid? They were at that time, as we are.

***Members***

Last year I spoke about my associate directors in the EC, now I would like to turn our attention to ourselves. I tried to be in contact with some of you, I phoned or written e-mails. I was following your personal lives, your sorrows, problems and joys in the same time. It is so good to know that between our Lord’s promise to be with us, and encouragement to not loose heart it is the command of proclaiming his word. In our case, we represent him, and we try to speak about his power, his redemption and offer to have a better life.

Sometimes not just those people’s lives were entangled in the mesh of everyday problems, which we see regularly, but our life as well. We may suffer from depression, from loneliness, from different health issues, from the loss of our loved ones, from the problems of getting older. And God still trusted us, his earthly, fragile vessels to proclaim the good news of the resurrection of his Son, and that “The kingdom of God has come near” (Mark 1:17). This nearness prompts us to repent and believe the good news. Paul writes so beautifully to the Christian congregation based in Rome: “I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong, that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith” (Romans 1:11-12). He is an apostle, who alone worked more than all the other twelve, to whom the European Christianity is indebted profoundly, yet he does not speak boastfully or contemptuously about the Roman Christians, but he acknowledges that he can also learn from them, from their faith. In the same way, we are not there just as omnipotent and omniscient persons in our dialogues and spiritual accompaniment, but as directors who participate, partake, listen, and receive something from our counterparts.

Paul writes to the congregation in Rome, that “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves” (Rome 15:1). We, who are strong. I don’t know if you regard yourself as a strong person, but if you received the call from our Lord to minister among his sheep, you received power as well to fulfil your ministry. It is not easy to sit with people, listen to them carefully, and have a dialogue with them, walk with them in order that their lives may be built up, that they find the right path and direction. We need the constant guidance of the Holy Spirit to say the right words, to intuit (it comes from the Latin word *tuere*, which means to look upon, to pay attention), sense His will, to remain quiet and silent in order to hear the soft-spoken sound, the low voice of the Spirit. Without this, we are in great difficulty.

***Preparation work for meeting in Estonia***

Let us turn our attention to what happened last year in our organization. Those who were able and privileged to attend the meeting in Iceland, returned home and continued our faithful work. The preparation work for the meeting in Estonia started earlier, and the EC met online in June with the Estonia team. We discussed again about your feed-back from our previous meeting, because we wanted to learn from you and improve our preparatory activity. Many of you missed the workshops, therefore we took seriously your suggestions and started to think how could be inserted in our program. Liina was in charge to organise the workshops, and she wrote many e-mails in which many of you were asked for a contribution. Some of you were able to accept the invitation, and in the same time we learned how many of you struggle with different problems in your private life. We are so grateful for all of you who finally said yes to Liina’s request. I hope that you will enjoy on Sunday these workshops. We always learn a lot from them.

***Visiting Estonia***

In the beginning of September, we finally travelled to Estonia to look at the places available for us, and meet the Estonia team face to face. It was a great privilege to arrive to this holy land with so many friendly people. I do remember looking down from the airplane when approaching Tallinn, and I had the feeling that I will land on a peninsula, as from the north is surrounded by the Baltic Sea and Gulf of Finland, from west by the Gulf of Riga, and on the east side by Narva Bay, lake Peipus, and lake Pskov. A peninsula is connected to the main land, and has a part bordered by the sea. I do not know how the Estonians regards their own country, but I felt that for them is important the connection with the others, and in the same time they are strong willed free spirits.

One of our main problems was to find the proper place, where we can be all together. We checked a few places, but it seemed that we would not be able to stay in the same building, which seemed to cause us headaches to organise the meals and meetings. I am so pleased that we find Nelijärve, and here we can enjoy each other’s presence, without having to walk shorter of longer distances to be together.

In October we had again an online EC meeting, where we discussed the dynamic of the Estonia team and tried to answer their questions. The Estonia group members were very helpful and they divided their tasks among themselves. Many ideas were expressed and we tried to choose the best one for us. After going through the program and deciding about them, we discussed and planned the autumn Member’s day meeting.

In the beginning of January we had an EC meeting. As we drew closer to our meeting in Estonia, and the tasks of preparation multiplied quickly, the EC decided to be more actively involved in the preparatory work of the Estonia team, and one or two EC members to participate at their meetings. So we did participate in January, March, and May in the meetings, and learned how skilful and resourceful are our hosts. If you have not yet organized an annual meeting, you may not know how much work, prayer, struggle and joy is in such a work. We are blessed that our Estonia team worked in such a dedicated way and prepared for us everything from the bottom of their heart, and we may enjoy the fruit of their preparatory work.

***Member’s Days - Masterclasses***

In November we had our Member’s day, and were delighted by two exceptional masterclasses held by Una Agnew and Denis Gleeson. Una spoke about “A Holy Encounter”, and Denis about “The centering prayer and how we can accompany someone whose prayer is mainly silence”. We discussed in four groups the presentations, and then united in a big group to learn from each other’s feed-back. The masterclass term was a bit scary for some of us, but slowly we understood that idea, and enjoyed the skilful presentation and the wisdom accumulated by our sisters and brothers. At the end Stiiv Knowers spoke about the preparations going on in Estonia, and invited us to honour the meeting with our presence in May.

In March we had our second Member’s day with another two excellent masterclasses. Our former Chair, Johan Muijtjens spoke about “The Fourfold Path of Forgiving and Reconciliation”, and Penny Warren quieted us down by her remarkable presentation entitled “Finding balance of life with those we accompany”. After listening to them, we shared in sub-groups, then returned for a final discussion in the plenary. I feel that God blessed us with so many talented members, who can share with us from their wisdom and experience. We would like to continue this practice, so you might start to think about your own contribution during our next meetings.

***Executive Committee***

Kathryn prepared for us Newsletters in June, August, September and November, we could learn from those what is prepared for us, what is going on, what are the news, and where are we invited. We had Advent and Lent resources uploaded by our Secretary, and offered by Maria Theresa Portelli from Malta. Teemu explained to us patiently what is the difference between membership fee and administration fee, which was reduced from 100 Euros to 50 Euros, and is due to be paid yearly by all of us, not just those attending a meeting. Teemu kept our balance sheet faithfully, and done a tremendous work to run not into debts. He will speak in more details about this shortly. Kathryn and Teemu worked very hard to improve our new website, which I encourage you to use as often as possible. I would like to say special thanks to those who thought of our needy members, and gathered, donated sums that made easier for some of us to be present here. Thanks to them, we were able to offer 5 scholarships in total of 1650 Euros. I would like to express our gratitude to all of you, who supported us by your faithful prayers. Without those, we could not do our work for you. Here I would like to remind you about the opportunity of praying shortly for each other daily at 8 pm.

***New Members***

Since last year, one of our members, Sisko Raitis, returned to her Creator. Let us keep a moment of silence in her memory.

We are happy to announce that eight new members are ready to join our helpful community: Lorraine Tabone (Malta), Renee Molitor (France), Christopher Peterson (Sweeden), Kārlis Irbe (Latvia), Annely Neame (Estonia), Margit Lail (Estonia), Elve Bender (Estonia) and Kerstin Kask (Estonia). We heartily welcome them in our SDE family!

Please do accept my report.

Lehel Lészai

Chair