

SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS INTERNATIONAL - EUROPE

Versailles, 7-10 February 2003

This time, the fourth gathering already, thirty five persons from thirteen different countries met in the Convent of "Notre Dame du Cénacle" in Versailles - France. The participants were members of SDI and others working in the ministry of spiritual direction, including Liz Budd Ellmann, the Executive Director of SDI and Carol Ludwig, a member of SDI Coordinating Council.

They gathered together in order

- to support and encourage each other in the ministry of spiritual direction;
- to learn from each other's wisdom and
- to appreciate our cultural and spiritual diversity.

The organizing committee: Henry Morgan, Pirkko Lehtiö, Johan Muijtjens with the help of Sr. Marie-Geneviève Renaud in Versailles, had done a very good job. They found a quiet, welcoming and spacious place in a beautiful environment, which added to the prayerful atmosphere throughout the encounter. This atmosphere contributed a lot to the generous cooperation of every participant to make this a valuable happening.

At the Opening Meeting on Friday evening, absent members were remembered, greetings were shared, new members were welcomed and the ones who met at other occasions were very happy to see one another again! Beforehand all participants had been invited to bring some typical food or drink from their own country in order to enjoy one another's culture on a small scale. This added to a joyful exchange during breaks and evening recreation. Maureen Farrell and Pirkko Lehtiö led a very devote and simple Evening Prayer to close the day.

Participants were also asked to bring an object or symbol that had been important to their spiritual journey in the past year. The deep sharing in small groups on Saturday morning was centred around these symbols and also around our concerns for world issues. This happened to be an important aspect of the encounter. In the afternoon we made a trip to le Château de Versailles, half an hour's walk away.

After breakfast on Saturday morning, Martica took care of the Morning Prayer. While the name of each country was mentioned, Bernadette lit a candle to symbolize the presence of that country. The theme of the prayer was "Emmaus". Maike Ewert continued in the evening on this theme during her "Eucharist without words", which was a very impressive ending of the first day.

Sunday morning Patricia Roberts guided us in Body-Prayer with Tai-chi to greet the new day and the rich programme to come. Her energetic and lively presentation made you feel ten times more energetic than usual. Many of us decided on the spot to continue with these exercises at home.... An important aspect was the prayerful meditation on what made us worry and what made us happy right now and share that with one another. Quite some time was spent in working in small groups and triads. In the afternoon we had a session on group spiritual direction. The day ended by celebrating a Lutheran Eucharist, conducted by Mikko Peura.

Monday morning time was given for reflection on our gathering, business meeting and planning for the future. SDE is growing and evolving and it was felt that now is the time to start drawing up a draft constitution. A small group from different countries volunteered to help the steering committee with this during the coming year. A valuable contribution was made to this business meeting by Eva-Sibylle Vogel-Mfato who works for the European Council of Churches. One suggestion Eva made was that SDE should consider becoming an associate member of KEK.

The steering committee will choose the time and location for next year's meeting and try to figure out what could be the best way to develop this organization more across Europe, taking into account what was suggested in this last plenary meeting.

The Closing worship was led by Christine Head in a joyful and creative way. This marked the end of another precious gathering.

Martica van der Meer and Bernadette Leach