

Report from Vranov

SD-Europe, 50 people, were expected to meet in Vranov by Brno, the Czech Republic, from the 24th to 27th of February 2006 for the 7th annual meeting.



This reporter wanted a longer stay and met at Prague Airport on Wednesday the 22nd.

It turned out that other participants were of the same idea and together with the Executive Committee, Pirkko Lehtiö, Finland; Henry Morgan, UK; Johan Muijtjens, Netherlands, and the local organizer, sister Gisela Heitz, Czech, we arrived at the Pilgrim-Centre at Vranov in the evening. And what a blessing to be met by welcoming Sisters of St. Francis.

The conference needed some more practical preparations and hands to do so. The 9 “early birds” had enough to do the following day and when the conference members arrived late Thursday night the beds were prepared to receive tired travellers and the Programme was ready to take off.



Breakfast Friday morning was the first meeting point for all the participants. Some were old acquaintances and had met before; others were newcomers. Laughter and conversation were laudable.



Opening Worship and Coming to know one another.

Then silence became audible. Prayerful with candles and local soil we presented our own countries and ourselves in front of Moses and the burning bush. Greetings became prayer.

Going deeper



A piece of art, an important scripture passage, an experience with God, being shared and listened to, became a meeting point between us, and everybody shared the essence in simplicity by the “one” sentence on the board:

” Be open and trust - Stay in peace - Gods care is disproportionate - I am present in simplest actions - You will meet me in your neighbour - Practical exercises: be present to myself and to each other - I am with you - Stillness + sensitivity - There are no limits - I am close to you, Stay in peace - I love you unconditionally - Be open and trust -”.

Interview



And we met **Jan Konzal** from the Underground church, interpreted and interviewed by **Ivana Noble**.

Some of the questions being asked were:

- *How would you like to introduce yourself?
- *How did the specific experiences of the underground church enrich the whole of the church?
- *In which form of spiritual direction were you engaged before 1989 and which form after 1989?
- *Did you learn new things from giving spiritual exercises and spiritual accompanying to the Christians from other denominations?
- *Which forms of cultivating of spiritual life would you

like to see in the church of these days?

We were witnessing a humble, elderly man with a warm welcoming smile caring for the people with whom he shared his experience of Christian life in a special history and political situation for his people and church.

He had had the experience of loosing his speech and “I had to do some effort to help God to like me” and “the gift of faith is a gift”. “If I am a Christian I am here for the others” always with “personal responsibility”. Jan Konzal was ordained Bishop in the Underground Church for ten years without his wife knowing anything about it. That would have been too dangerous.

His answers to the questions were profound and this reporter would invite Ivana Noble to write down an interview with Jan Konzal. His personal experience is the experience of The Underground Church as such and The Church wants to know.

As social evening we saw a film [The Forgotten Light] underlining **Church history in Czechoslovakia** between 1968 and 1989.

Morning worship



Sister Angela Ramme introduced us to liturgical dance by musing and her singing bowl. Everybody enjoyed prayerfully!

What is spiritual direction?

We got some scriptural examples to look into, each one choosing one:

- *Eli and Samuel: 1Sam 3, 1-10
- *David and Nathan: 2Sam 12, 1 - 14
- *Mary and Elisabeth: Luke 1, 39 - 56
- *Nicodemus and Jesus: Joh 3, 1 - 21
- *Samaritan woman and Jesus: Joh 4, 4 - 30
- *Philip and the Ethiopian Official: 8, 26 - 36



Then we shared with the ones having picked out the same scripture and then in groups with various examples; turning out to be an important experience. In the end we learned about the various situations for spiritual direction.

Panel: developments in spiritual direction.



Lehel Leszai, Romania, Linda Ceple, Latvia, [chair], Susanne Hoyos, Denmark, and Josep Maria Bullich, Spain, participated in the panel.

This panel was based on questions the participants from the Czech Republic had forwarded for reflection:

Some of the questions were:

- *Who benefits from spiritual direction?
- *How can spiritual direction help people in their personal development?
- *How have your experiences with giving spiritual direction changed over the period of time you have been

involved in it – in issues addressed, in forms?

*How have your initial convictions about spiritual direction changed?

*What are, according to you, the most important tasks and characteristics of a spiritual director?

After the presentations by the panel members, we split in nationally mixed groups and entered in lively discussions.

"Sadness and Hope"

followed by **Sharing in groups-of-three ("triads")**



Sunday morning Claudia Theinert, Netherlands, greeted us welcome to her own performance about Sadness and Hope.

Together with Marit Brinkmann, Norway, they movingly showed us sadness and hope as our faithful life companions.

This became an important introduction to the sharing of personal experiences in groups-of-three Sunday morning.

Business:

- *Tasks for the Executive Committee,
- * Report from the Treasurer,
- * Election of the Executive Committee.



The present members were re-elected with acclamation: Chairman: Johan Muijtjens, Netherlands; Secretary: Henry Morgan, UK; Treasurer: Pirkko Lehtiö, Finland; and a fourth member of the committee was added and elected: Ligita Ryliskyte, Lithuania.



The conference is grateful for what the committee has achieved and for what they are up to. They got their blessing by everybody at a time and Maike Ewert, Germany, and Peter Ball, UK, performed a moving ceremony.

Sightseeing



Happily we had the chance to see a little bit of Vranov, listen to the moving history about the founder of the place and some of us attended mass in the Pauline chapel. Josef Stuchly, Czech, guided us in the big baroque church and particularly we enjoyed the Crib with lights and music.

Peter Ball's sketch of the pilgrimage church >>

Closing Worship



The lights were designated and all the soil united in a pot for a plant to be presented to the local Sisters. Only the painting, Moses and the burning bush were left to remind us of the burning flame of life and hope.

Thanks to the five Franciscan Sisters and the five Pauline Brothers for their hospitality at our meeting in Vranov.



All the name labels with beautiful flowers made by Maureen Farrell (picture) and Deirdre McConnell decorated the participants throughout the meeting! Thanks to the flower - artists!

Thanks to all the participants from the Czech Republic and especially Jan Konzal and Ivana Noble for sharing with us experiences from the Underground Church and Gisela Heitz for her energetic practical assistance. And last but not least thanks to our Executive Committee for leadership and love.

*Anne Grete Hagen
Norway*