

A FREE SPIRIT

AN OVERVIEW ...

The SD Europe Meeting in Wahlwiller, The Netherlands, February 12th -17th, 2009

(Several pictures can be enlarged - and more pictures in the gallery ...)



All roads lead to Arnold Janssen Klooster at Wahlwiller on this cold February 12th evening. From fifteen countries we have travelled to reunite once more as we converge for our annual meeting on the quiet retreat house of the Holy Spirit Sisters in a beautifully wooded and surprisingly hilly corner of Holland.



Tim Noble's directions have been perfect; everyone has arrived safely. This little finger of Netherlands, dipping into Belgium to the south and west and bordering Germany to the east, takes us snugly to its heart. Snow is in the air. Within a short space of time, the trees and lawns are covered in a delicate sprinkling of snow.

Inside the atmosphere is warm as the Dutch group welcome us with kisses and hugs of welcome. "**We are travelling a life time**" is the refrain that continues to haunt us, "**Home is where the heart is**". At supper we are tucking into Gouda and Edam cheeses with the best that Holland has to offer our supper table. And after prayer, we can already taste samplings of goodies lovingly carried from far and near to share with one another.



This SD Europe Meeting, whose overall theme is, A Free Spirit opens with prayer and sharing from each country. **Each one receives a dove** on which is printed a gift of the Spirit. Soon a full flight of multi-coloured doves, Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-control, is formed to make a striking centrepiece that adorns our meeting place each day throughout our time here. Gifts of the Spirit in every colour, climate and language. A dove to represent each one of us...

FRIDAY morning finds us greeting the new snow-clad day in a carefully chosen prayer led by Tim and Evana. By mid morning we are already "**Going Deeper**" as **Sanny Bruijns**, OCarm, directs us in twos, to express our spiritual calling, first as a personal journey and then as a pilgrimage with Mary.



Each one parallels his/her life-calling with that of Mary. Significant moments are shared: conceiving Christ in our lives, giving birth to Christ in life and work, the loss of Jesus in the temple, the quiet hidden life at Nazareth, standing at the foot of the Cross, being with the suffering Christ, being with Christ risen in our lives, being empowered by the Spirit and at times, singing our Magnificat. Already I experience the depth dimension of our lives being sounded and the free Spirit bonding us together as one.

In the afternoon at Part One of the AGM, the skilled expertise of the administering team of SD Europe became abundantly evident. At first there is the excellent and concise report from Johan Muijtjens, Founding Member of SD Europe, who will hand over the robes of office before this meeting ends. To his great credit, he has served and promoted the organisation magnificently since its inception 10 years ago.



Raili Heikinheimo demonstrated in Power Point, the financial position of the Organisation and its budget for next year. Her only problem is that we have made a profit! No credit crunch here! So the Organisation is financially sound for another year. Over these days, Raili untiringly collects fees and subscriptions in her finance office. News from Manresa, Spain informs us at the end of this part of the AGM that our friend Emmanuel Casanova SJ who hosted us last year is terminally ill. We are united in prayerful solidarity with him in his suffering. Christine Head and Maureen Farrell also evoke our sympathy and prayers; they are remembered with thoughtful affection. Several suggestions are surfacing as to where our 2010 meeting will take place. I think Finland has the vote!

WORKSHOPS ON FRIDAY AFTERNOON.



Study and reflection are in the air. We sense an intellectual alertness and wise skill in action as we 'to' and 'fro' to a variety of workshops. "Spiritual Direction in Judaism" by **Hannah Nathans** opens up new religious vistas for the participants.



On **SATURDAY** morning we are fed, booted and spurred by 8.30 a.m. and ready for our trip to Maastricht with Johan and Claudia as guides. Maastricht's history goes back to c. 50 B.C., when the Romans built a settlement and called it the 'Mosae Trajectum', Maas-tricht, the site where the river Maas could be crossed. Memorable were the spacious Market Square, home of many pageants and the sculpted face of the beautiful Basilica of Saint Servatius.

Aware of it wrought history we wended our way along the famous **Purgatory Street** that separates St John's Protestant Church on the one side from St Servatius' Basilica on the other. That cobblestone walk is one I will remember as we entered the Catholic Church by the pilgrim's door and were **warmly greeted by its parish priest**. The Church's treasures are many but most of all, the tomb of the Armenian holy man SeRvatius who brought the Christian faith to Maastricht in the 4th century.



A second equally warm **welcome to elegant St John's**, to its history and to Claudia's moving prayer service. This was fittingly topped by a magnificent organ recital.



In the afternoon we were treated to the very best of Dutch Spiritual Scholarship in the person of Dr Professor **Kees Waijmaan**, O.Carm. Appraising our contemporary multifaceted spiritual landscape, he suggests that mystagogy may provide a means by which things old and things new become mutually enriched. When the Free Spirit is genuinely at work in a community, She brings new life to tradition and enriches with traditional sensibility those seeking new expressions of faith.



The afternoon saw us **painting à deux!** Our pairings just happened. Seated, paint brush in hand, each of us learned to trust the other in a new way—to progress cautiously step by step—to wait for each new offering before responding to it, to see a pattern emerge and to learn when to stop and allow the Spirit free movement on canvas. Works of art emerged. What a creative exercise!



Silent Eucharist accompanied by a blaze of candlelight and the soul-haunting song of a young woman brought us to the moment when Henry introduced us to Silence and Retreat.



SUNDAY: SILENT RETREAT DAY

And on the third day there was silence over the whole earth. And we prayed.... With gratitude we brought the fruits of our prayer to **Evening liturgy** and placed around the centrepiece our symbolic offerings in a blaze of candles, now transformed into a spring garden of early primula and daffodils. Dancing still at the centre was our flight of doves. Maïke, our Eucharist Celebrant brought the silence of the day to a close. We communed together in the joy of renewed spiritual energies.

At our Social that night we were part of a multi-talented event; Song and Story from fifteen different cultures brought laughter and happiness to all. To crown our celebration, "**Fatima**" from Morocco and "**Mr Calvin**" himself, took centre stage while the **Royal Princess of Holland**, in gorgeous attire, lent grace and intelligence to the occasion.



Is there no end to the talents in SD Europe? Secretly I enjoyed the dancing best of all - I see **Lithuanian talent** come alive in dance—what a treat!



On MONDAY we return to our “Everyday God” in prayer and moved after the usual abundant breakfast into the second part of the AGM. Voting and white smoke! **Henry Morgan** has been elected Director of SD Europe for the coming year.

Tim expertly conducts the elections. How can we thank Johan for all he has done over the past ten years? Graciously and without fuss, he steps aside for a new leader.



Litiga Ryliskyte also steps down to welcome **Zsuzsanna Laczko** on Board.



Both **Johan Muijtens** and **Ligita Ryliskyte** can happily sing their Nunc Dimitis—because they have seen the organisation grow in strength and purpose over the years. Henry Morgan, as New Director will now carry its torch into the future. We pray blessings on him and on all who generously takes up the challenge to serve in leadership on our behalf.



Monday evening we begin our Goodbyes. This was a surprise and unforgettable occasion. Donning our coats, Gideon delights us with a gift of **multi-coloured balloons** to which we carefully attach the new dove and new gift as the doves are re-distributed in ritual. Out of doors, at a given signal, we let go!



The sight of a host of coloured balloons flying off into the distance, with a myriad of Gifts of the Spirit attached, is something we will never forget. The doves sailed into the ether, airborne in a haze of coloured balloons. This moment signalled **farewells and blessings and letting go**. The rain fell gently on our faces...blessings rained down in abundance... but as the rain and cold gathered momentum, good sense and sound discernment brought us indoors to conclude a memorable farewell ceremony.



One dove refused to leave. Rescued from the rain by one of the Holy Spirit Sisters, this frail but sturdy creature is brought indoors, wiped and cleansed. Faithfulness has refused to leave us. This homing bird's prayer is for openness to the Heavens above and to the earth beneath our feet; **Antoinette** van Gulp's opening prayer on the very first evening. And so we leave Wahlwiller with this same blessing on our heads.



Thanks to all who worked at each detail of our event to make it memorable and spiritually enriching. Thanks to our gracious hostesses the Holy Spirit Sisters who quietly watched over us and to **Claudia Theinert** in particular, who spared nothing for our convenience and comfort during our stay.

And so... Next stop
Finland, to TURKU IN FEBRUARY, 2010,
and to another SD-Europe Meeting!



Una Agnew, Dublin 25 February 2009

WE RECEIVED MANY GIFTS:



Peter Ball presented us with one of his well known drawings (looking out of the big window at the first floor):

Enjoy **MANY MORE PICTURES** made by Judith Dumont, Marika Zelca Cerane and Margit Locker.

And last but not least: Paul Booth was inspired by "Wahlwiller" and sent us some of HIS **NEW POEMS** !

HOW BLESSED WE ARE WITH SO MANY CONTRIBUTIONS !