

The SD Europe Meeting in Turku, Finland

February 24th – March 1th, 2010

Living in the Borderlands



This year the SD Europe meeting took place in Turku, on the southwest coast of Finland at the mouth of the Aura River. We were guests of the Turku Christian Institute which operates in the spirit of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church.

During these five days at the SDE meeting we have tasted many different things but first of all, we have tasted a community: a community as home, a community as paradise and a community as a team.



A Community as home we experienced from our very first contact with Finnish people Helena and Leena and other members at Helsinki airport and very warm welcome by Henry, Raili, Tim and Zsuzsanna at the lobby of the Institute. Although we were 62 all together from 18 different countries, different denominations (Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed) we felt that God brought us home, where we can share and listen to our sacred stories and to discuss our important issues.



A Community as paradise we experienced in many different ways of being together: in silence, sharing, prayers, worships, meditation, Emmaus walk (picture), celebration of the Eucharist et cetera. Also we worked as a team with a clear vision to share our gifts and to help one another to grow in freedom, confidence and competence and in intimacy in our relationship with God and to live out the consequences of the relationship.

THE FIRST DAY



We started as usual with supper where Henry warmly welcomed new members and greeted all of us. Our meeting, whose theme is "Living in the Borderlands," opened with meditatively singing, prayer and the reading from Ephesians (2:19) which reminded us that we no longer foreigners...but members of God's household. We were invited to introduce ourselves by choosing a cardboard tree which represents each of us and our borderlands. At the end of the introduction our trees have formed on the floor a big square of our borderlands. Tags with words in the center of this square such as "ignorance", "rich", "isolation", "loneliness", "alienation"

reminds us of our borders and our wounded condition. But also it speaks to us that the wounds or borders will be revealed to us as the place of blessing, the holy place where God intimated his new creation.

In this meeting we were pleased to see many new faces, in particular, from Italy and Moldova and the biggest group (about 22 members) from Finland.

The rest of the evening was space for social time, meeting friends, sharing stories and the goodies that had been brought from our various countries.

THE SECOND DAY

At morning worship Una Agnew led us to greet the new day in the Celtic way, and draw the circle of protection and to rejoice in Christ's presence with me, before me, behind me, above me, within me, on my right and left, when I sit down or arise... After this prayer of protection we are ready to go deeper.



Hugo Simberg' painting of "The Wounded Angel" strikes us for "Going deeper" when Jussi Holopainen invited us to contemplate the painting as a mirror. It reminded me of Henry Nouwen's The Wounded Healer where story tells us, that the Messiah is sitting among the poor, binding his wounds one at a time, waiting for the moment when he will be needed. But the others unbind all their wounds at the same time and then bind them up again. The painting mirrors me that a spiritual director is called to be the wounded healer, the one who must look after his own wounds but at the same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others.

After house and sauna introduction we had rich Finnish lunch and then we moved to workshops. There were organized seven different workshops:



- Aija Kaartinen "Praying with the icons" (see picture)
- Aija-Leena Ranta "Meditative singing and the spirituality of whole body"
- Ivana Noble "The Ladder of Divine Ascent: Three Ways of Speaking and Many Ways of Seeing"
- Johan Muijtjens: "Dreams in Spiritual Direction"
- Peter Ball "Being Present to Tradition"
- Valfrid Botnen "Desire"
- Fr. Heikki Huttunen „Jesus prayer“

I have chosen a workshop „Dreams in spiritual direction” where Johan Muijtjens opens up the symbolic language of our inner world. Sharing our experiences and working with my dream by acting it out helped me to touch a bit with the creative power of dream and with part of my inner self. I believe that working with dreams can be the inner guides for our personal growth and for those who are entrusted to our guidance. We got many good reviews from the other six workshops.



At the AGM our treasurer Raili Heikinheimo gave us the presentation of the financial report and budget for next year. Financial situation of our organization seems stable. Applauds were a grace for all the work she has done! Raili would like to step back. So, we were asked to suggest some new candidates for treasurer.



We were united in prayerful solidarity with those members who are terminally ill and suffering from their limitations.

Several suggestions were discussed about where our annual meeting will take place in 2011 and 2012. Next year the SD Europe meeting will be held in Volkenroda cloister, in Germany.



We ended the day with Eucharist celebration in Reformed Calvinist tradition presented by Lehel Leszai.



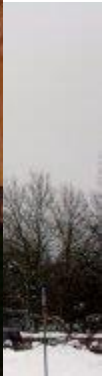
I believe that during liturgy sowed good seeds are growing up and will bring good fruits.

Like always rich supper, spiritual and cultural beneficial social meetings were waiting for us tonight too.



THE THIRD DAY

Although this morning greets us with cold and snow after good Finnish breakfast we were ready for a trip guided by Sisko Raitis to the city of Turku.



Turku came into existence during the end of 13th century which makes it the oldest city in Finland. Also it was the first capital city of Finland from 1809 to 1812. Turku is still a regional capital and important location for business and culture. Turku is a notable commercial and passenger seaport city with over three million passengers travelling through Port of Turku each year to Stockholm and Mariehamn.

During the year 2011 Turku has been designated to be the European Capital of Culture together with Tallinn. We visited three of the most remarkable Churches in the city.



St. Mary's church according to folklore was built on pagan sacrificial spot in the village of Rantamaki and originally dedicated to St. Dionysios, first Bishop of Paris, but later was renamed St. Mary's. In front of the altar is an altar crucifix from the 14th century. Four sand clocks in the pulpit was a nice image for us that not the longest preaching is the best one. Sisko worked in this church.



Silence and listening of "Ave Maria Stella" performed by Aija-Leena Ranta helped us to meditate and sense the spirit of this church.

St. Henry's Ecumenical Art Chapel, rising from a forested hill in Turku's Hirvensalo, is a unique building (the shape reminds of the boat or fish) which is representing eight Christian denominations and communities and symbolizing the unity of the churches.

When we have opened the heavy bronze door we stepped into what seems to be "a belly of a huge fish" as in Jonah's story. Silence and music played by the Saxophone quintet "Blåslagetin" led us into our inner place of quiet and faith experience. In the moment of waiting, trust and listening stirs a new life, new understanding as Jonah did. I feel invited to this kind of silence, waiting and trusting in my life in order to learn how to ponder and in order to come home.



When we visited Turku Cathedral, the mother church of the Lutheran Church of Finland, I was moved by J.S. Bach prelude played by pianist Jussi Laukola. Somehow the music has awaked in me the value of waiting. Jesus' life is based on waiting and being passive. It was important for me to realize that Jesus fulfills His mission not by what He does, but by what is done to him. What does this really mean for me?



After lunch we saw and discussed a touching Finnish film „Letters to Father Jacob” (film director Klaus Härö, original script Jaana Makkonen). The first question after this film in our discussing group was: Who is directing who? Some of us see this movie as an icon of the spiritual direction and made some link between the film and the picture of „Wounded Angel.” This film was a very effective way to look at our ministry from a different perspective. We are very grateful to Paivi Vuorilehto who made the DVD of this film available to us!



The Silent Eucharist presented by Mikko Peura and Marjatta Malmberg led us into the silent day. The Eucharist accompanied by the picture “Armo-Mercy, Grace” (Finnish artist Osmo Rauhala) awakened in us the meditation of what happens at this border, what happens at the border of confession and forgiveness, sin and grace, the bread and the body of Christ. It placed us into the very heart of the Eucharist. May God bless your silence with His presence!

THE FOURTH DAY



[elemer vizi eucharist] It was a big privilege for our multicultural community to spend a day in silence. During the silent day the whole Christian Institute transformed into "holy ground." We have celebrated silence in our prayer rooms, Sauna, walking in the snowy woods and Emmaus Walk, the silent worship and the Eucharist. To celebrate silence is to meet and discover our truest selves, to grow toward the fullness of life. Silence helped us to cultivate and deepen our passionate love for God, to choose God when "the honeymoon is gone." It provided the atmosphere of true and authentic communication with God. We experienced that silence is essentially

listening which brings us home. The silent day ended with a Catholic Eucharist led by Jesuit Elemer Vizi.



Our Social that night starts with a party outside all around a fire. Finnish group taught us to enjoy the party outside although it was a snow-clad yard. We enjoyed very much by making pancakes, barbecue and another goodies and the community of thoughts and feelings. Jussi has restored our childhood when invited us for sledge. It was so much fun to try our best on the sledge and not to fall down or not to get directed to the garage which was at the end of our sledge track. Thank God no big accidents! Our Social we have continued inside with dance, plays and songs which brought laughter and happiness to all.

THE FIFTH DAY



After breakfast and worship we met in TRIADS. I think that triads served several functions. First, it encouraged us to enter the world of our own depths and to discover God's presence in our life. Second, it was an aid for us to reflect on our ministry and our experience. Third, it helped to sharpen our spiritual direction skills and develop a discerning heart. Like always we felt that triads were a most valuable session and we are glad that this year we had enough time.

In the afternoon we moved in to Workshops on different themes (Supervision, Freelance, Payment in the Spiritual Direction, Models of the Spiritual Direction and Trying in Spiritual Direction) and shared in small groups our wisdom and experiences.



At the AGM Henry invited us to make the group discernment where to make the SDE meeting in 2012 in UK or in Norway. And so, the SDE meeting in 2012 will be in Norway!

We have discussed about the life member issues and importance to continue to write the story of "Spiritual Directors in Europe."

No new candidates for the treasurer, so Raili will continue to serves us in this way. (picture: Raili blessed by us all)



The music and the strains of ancient Finnish poets (Kalevala collected by Elias Lonnroth) led us into a closing liturgy. Very touching movement was when in pairs holding one another hands we sang along an epos from Kalevala asking God to protect, shepherd and support us. Our last sharing in small groups came up with new understanding and many different insights of our borderlands. We believe that our borderlands can be transformed into the holy place, the way or space where something new can be born and can grow. The last meal together, the last social time and our Goodbyes wishing everyone a safe journey!

I believe while we grow in freedom, confidence, and new relationships with God, some kind of creativity and power is released that can renew our communities, families and Churches. Now we seem ready for more: more intimacy with God and others in freedom from fear of borderlands and more meaning, joy and abundant life in our families, faith communities and ministries.

Thanks to all who worked at each detail of our meeting to make it special and unique. We are grateful to the Executive Committee for all the work they have done and in particular to the Finnish group for their work and hospitality.

Judita Stankunaite, SJE