

SDE Volkenroda 23 Feb – 1 March 2011

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 23

OPENING WORSHIP



For all of us, the adventure began at home. We set out from familiar territory to make our journey to Volkenroda. For many of us, but not all, the first meeting point was at Terminal 1 of Frankfurt Airport. It was like a large city! Here, to be lost was easy – to be found was wonderful and life-giving as we came across other SDE pilgrims! At last the bus left the Airport, and our journey continued.

It is a long journey, and we are tired and hungry when we arrive. But God meets us in the shape of members of the Jesus Brotherhood of Volkenroda, and those members of SDE who had already arrived.

We are welcomed by members of the Committee and the German group led by Maike Ewert. It was Maike who had 'found' Volkenroda and whose vision had brought us here. Under her leadership they worked hard to prepare a wonderful experience for us over the next few days.

When our bodies have been fed with delicious local breads, meats and cheese we journey on with God as we meet in the inspirational space of glass, wood and metal which is set inside some of the broken walls of the Chapter House of the old Cistercian monastery. Here monks fell in, and fell out. Now here 52 people from 16 nations gather. We 'fall in', and hope we don't fall out with each other!



The light of Christ is the theme of our opening worship. We sing, and the Christ candle is lit. From it, as the members from each country step forward and name themselves, candles are lit for each nation and tealights for each person.

One Christ candle, 16 country candles, and 52 people-of-God candles!
Hallelujah!



As we meet national group of members by name, so they greet us with 'Peace be with you' in their own language, and write it for the boards which become 'gates of shalom' as we enter and leave the meeting room each time over the coming days.

Christ's peace offered in 16 different ways – yet all the same special peace of the same special Christ.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 24



Thursday, Friday and Saturday morning there was a possibility to join the Jesus Brotherhood community for the Communion service in the old monastery Church.



After the breakfast we had the morning worship at the Chapter house organized by the German group. Singing "The Lord is my shepherd" introduced the Going Deeper session. Kurt Dantzer led this session by guiding us to reflect and share in pairs on the Good Shepherd, the late Gothic keystone with the monastery seal. As usually at SDE meetings this Going deeper session was very inspiring and enriching, opening up in us new dimensions.

INTRODUCTION TO VOLKENRODA by Jens & Christiane Wolf

Christiane Wolf welcomed the conference and described how she and her husband joined the Jesus Brotherhood the day after their wedding. As young students they were seeking a place where people could learn to live together as followers of Christ.



Jens told the story of his own life and the history of the brotherhood with great honesty and openness. He emphasised his belief in the importance of communities, that God uses them to meet particular needs in the world. He instanced the work of Benedict and Francis in the circumstances of their day and his hope that the Jesus Brotherhood could be a sign of unity amidst the divisions of the present world. Begun in 1963, the life of the Brotherhood is based on daily prayer, Bible reading and times of silence. There are committed brothers and sisters and families, together with a certain number of young people who share the life for a period of time. As well as

looking to models of monastic life from Benedict onwards, inspiration also comes from Bonhoeffer's Common Life in the Body of Christ. The story of the community has been one of times of breakthrough and growth and a number of severe breakdowns. They are to be found in many countries around the world.

The Jesus Brotherhood first came to Volkenroda in response to the reunification of Germany, recognising the need to be open and reconciling to people from East and West, old and young, which needs work in relating and healing; it implies respect for one another, sharing in gifts, learning together in worship, work and community life. Geographically the place is central both to Germany and to Europe as a whole.

THE MONASTERY CHURCH AND THE CHRIST PAVILION



In the afternoon Christiane Wolf gave us the history of the site and the buildings, beginning with the 12th century foundation of the Cistercian monastery on the site of a previous castle. The church was consecrated in 1125. The abbey flourished and grew rich, but also unpopular with the local people. In the Peasants' War it was attacked and heavily damaged, finally being dissolved in 1540. Over the centuries the local Protestant congregation used what was left of the church for worship and several restorations took place. Nearly ten years from 1990 of very hard work and a great deal of money saw the new monastery built. The Jesus Pavilion,

created for the 2000 Expo in Hanover, was rebuilt on the South side of the old cloister and is now used for worship and evangelism, often with large groups of young people, using symbols and art work to present the elements of the Christian faith.



THE CHRIST WITHOUT ARMS

The symbol of Christ without Arms played a large part in the life of the conference. It stands in the Monastery Church, a Christ figure, armless and without facial features, upright on a dark, broad tau cross. Originally part of the rood probably hanging from the chancel arch, it was broken in the destruction of the church during the Peasants War and left lying amidst the rubble for centuries until a visiting pastor found it and took it back to his own home. When the restoration began, it was brought back to the monastery to become a focus of the liturgical space. The damaged Christ is seen to represent the world in its damaged, divided state; yet a world in which the love of God upon the cross is healing and reconciling.



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1



Later in the afternoon we had the first part of our AGM. Tim Noble was re-elected as Secretary of SDE for the next three years. Afterwards there was a proposal to reconsider the time for our annual meetings – to do it as usual at the end of February, or to attach it to special fixed liturgical moment later in spring. Although AGM is not the favourite, but necessary part of our meeting, our Chair Henry Morgan introduced us for communal discernment – where the Spirit is guiding us for the meeting in 2013? It raised several questions to consider: Southern or Eastern Europe; to promote SDE and open new contacts; how to live and share poverty (refuges, crisis time)? Is there at all to be a meeting

in 2013, or may be we should meet every second year?

SOCIAL TIMES



It is tradition at SDE meetings that after supper there are social times. It is a possibility to meet and share with each other in an informal atmosphere, have fun, as well taste different specialities from different countries that participants have taken with them. Social time is used also for some interest groups to meet for special meeting. On Thursday evening it was chance for spiritual directors – free lancers to share how the Spirit of God has guided their ministry since the last meeting.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 25

WORKSHOPS

On Friday mornings and Sunday afternoon the participants could participate at workshops prepared and lead by colleagues and hosts. This year there were offered several workshops.



Spiritual Direction in a Lutheran Context by Valfrid Botnen (Norway).

This workshop offered to look at the main streams that have formed the Lutheran tradition and how it forms our image of God and image of self. Valfrid prepared the workshop on spiritual direction in the Lutheran

tradition because this year our gathering was near the historical places where Luther worked and lived. The workshop also explored what are the challenges for a spiritual director to work in this tradition.



Sacred Dance
by Antje Breede (Germany).

The aim of the workshop was to embody our spiritual experiences and our quest for spirituality, to share it through our whole body and with our movements alone and with others. Sacred dance includes also gestures and moments of silence. During the workshop Antje offered several easy to learn sacred dances.



Te monk in yourself
by Antoinette van Gurp (The Netherlands).

A monastery and the community are the normal places for a monk, but Antoinette in her workshop explored the possibility to live as a monk in daily life in society. A monk in the world tries to give more space to the contemplative life than people usually do. The workshop was designed to meet one's inner monk and find out what it means for oneself.



Contemplating the Christ Pavilion
by Christiane Wolf (Germany).

During the workshop Christiane from the Volkenroda Community introduced the participants with the Christ Pavilion and lead a guided meditation around the paintings by Andreas Felger of the Pavilion.



Types of Spiritual Direction in Film
by Tim Noble (Czech Republic).

Tim used a film about Martin Luther to look at some different models of spiritual direction. He used the short extracts of the film as medium for reflecting on the process of spiritual direction. There was also possibility to see the whole film on Friday evening.

DISCERNMENT EXERCISE

After the workshop session Henry Morgan offered the Discernment Exercise session. At first in silence we were asked to remember time in our lives when things change, reflect how did a way become clear, and how did we got to know what we had to do.

Afterwards during the sessions we were given Biblical examples for reflection both for personal and communal discernment, as well we had possibility to share in pairs

The session was useful to deepen the understanding and experience of discernment that could foster discernment process for our SDE decisions.

AFTERNOON SESSIONS



The afternoon session The Christ without Arms was lead by Hildegard Kruempelmann and Folker Thamm from Germany.

At first Hildegard shared her personal experience how forty seven years ago she was sent as missionary to the people of Africa under the sign of Christ without Arms. Her rich life story started before the Second Vatican Council, followed by missionary work in Africa among people of different faiths, in conditions of poverty and AIDS, outcast and voiceless people, crucified among us today.

During the next session Handling our Differences we were asked to keep the image of Christ with no Arms in front of our eyes, and to imagine a historical story that had unfolded from this Christ's image. What tensions have been there – monks and lay people, rich and poor, power and powerless, the Catholics and the Protestants, the East and the West? Do any of these tensions hurt us personally? What Jesus says about it? May there be a gift of healing?



After sharing in pairs and a prayer for each other, we turned to reflecting on differences in SDE – among churches, religious and lay, men and women, languages, rich and poor, the West and the East. What might God invite us to learn from those who are different, what gift gives God? Handling the differences invites us to go deeper, to find what holds us together, what unites, to nourish it and keep it healthy.

SILENT EUCHARIST



After our supper the participants gathered for the Silent Eucharist, more precisely the Eucharist without Words. It was prepared and lead by Paul Booth. It was organized in the Chapter house. In the middle of room on the floor there were four wooden planks laid in the form of cross wrapped round with red cloth. Participants prepared to worship whilst listening to music by Arvo Pärt. Very consoling (and by the way unusual) was the confession of grace by pouring a little water into the cup of a neighbour, and taking a little portion of water to celebrate God's goodness within us.

While doing it there was the background music by Hildegard von Bingen. It was followed by God's word – we choose an image by the German artist Sieger Koder that lay around the cross in the middle of the hall, and in silence meditated it. Our prayers were named in our hearts and symbolically expressed to God by lighting up a small tee-candle, and / or blowing some bubbles, or place a small

wooden cross on four wooden planks laid in the form of cross. Also flags from all countries symbolically were laid down on the floor beside the big cross. As in Eucharist, there has also been penitence with kneeling or sitting in humility before God; it was followed by absolution ritual that has been done by everybody to his/her neighbour. Blessing of bread and wine, as well as its sharing in the circle, was done in silence. For final blessing of the worship a piece of music by John Rutter was used. It is a tradition that a silent Eucharist introduces the Silent Day that will last till the late afternoon of the next day.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26: THE SILENT DAY



It was our silent day when everybody could take time and use local space to nourish one's soul. One could wonder around Volkenroda that is a place with rich and interesting history, related to two pilgrimage routes Loccum – Volkenroda and Volkenroda – Waldsassen, and enjoy the beautiful and sunny day. One could spend time praying in the old Cistercian church or Christ's Pavilion, or simply walking around in nature, e.g. finding the thousand-year oak (the "king's oak", one of the oldest and most beautiful trees in Germany).



End of the Silent Day was celebrated by EUCHARIST in Roman Catholic rite, led by Fr. Joseph Bullich SJ.

There was also a possibility to attend a concert by pianist and composer Egidio Flamini in the church after the supper.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 27



The Sunday morning surprised us with white snow covering the land and fields around Volkenroda abbey. Although the snow melted during the day, we have had a chance to see how Volkenroda looks in winter. After the breakfast and morning worship on Sunday, we had traditional time for triads. The triads is a tradition originating from the first meeting of SDE, and it is a possibility for us to give spiritual direction to each other. After the lunch we had again chance to go for workshops. The same workshops have been offered, as on Friday, so everybody

could choose a second workshop from the list to attend.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2



In later afternoon we had the second part of our AGM, for which the first part was held on Thursday. During this part the financial report, which was prepared by Treasurer Raili Heikinheimo, was approved.

The Chair Henry Morgan gave report about the work of the Committee of SDE, as well as gathered the opinions about the venue and time of 2013 meeting.

CLOSING WORSHIP



Our closing worship on Sunday evening was carefully prepared by the German host group who had contributed so much to the ethos and hospitality of the whole meeting, working closely with the Norwegian group who will welcome us to Lia Gård next year.

We picked up again the 'light of Christ' theme as we sang and the Christ candle was lit. We were given a Pilgrim Passport to mark our journey through Volkenroda, our journey with God in the year ahead, and maybe on to Lia Gård next year.

Then the Christ candle was picked up and carried at the head of a procession from the Chapter House meeting room to a number of stations around the grounds and buildings of Volkenroda. Warm coats were certainly necessary – we had woken up to a white carpet of snow that morning! At each station (between the meeting room and the Christ Pavilion; the outer court of the CP; in the CP Cloisters) short Gospel verses were read in different languages, with the help of a torch and a bottle-crate for the readers to stand on!



Then a new acolyte would lift the Christ light and lead us in the pilgrimage procession, sometimes in silence, sometimes quietly singing a Taizé chant. I have lovely memories of heavenly harmonies of 'Ubi Caritas' ringing in my ears!

The procession ended in the old monastery Church, which had been such an important and poignant space during our time at Volkenroda. We grew a circle, still singing, as the procession threaded through the glass doors like a satin ribbon. Once gathered we prayed, we sang, we danced; and we blessed one another as God blessed us.



Especially we blessed and commissioned the Norwegian group for their discernment of next year's meeting at Lia Gård, where the snow is likely to be deeper than the 2 or 3 centimetres which fell at Volkenroda, but where we pray we too will go deeper with God, and God with us, as indeed was the experience of so many at Volkenroda this year.



Report done by Paul Booth (Opening Worship; Closing Worship) Peter Ball (Introduction to Volkenroda by Jens & Christiane Wolf; The Monastery Church and the Christ Pavilion; The Christ without Arms), and Marika Zelca-Cerane.