

Slovenia 4 - 9 March 2015



Jagged snow-capped-softened mountain peaks. Spring blossoming and a greening plain: the scene was all set for another meeting of SDE.

From as far as Reykjavic to the north-west, Russia to the north-east, Manchester to the north, Malta to the south and Moldova to the east, we gathered expectantly, at the beautiful Hisa Kruha: the House of Bread, Skofja Loka, near Ljubljana, at the beating heart of Europe.



Our looking forward to renewing friendships and making new ones was suddenly shattered. We were in shock. The realization was dawning: we were being invited to companion in compassionate listening and embrace a broken-hearted people whose story was one of grief.

Silent dark forests hid secrets: so-called 'cleansing', in truth and reality, the graves of mass-killings of neighbours and countrymen, women and even children. Our walking pilgrimage was made even more poignant by the ear-splitting cracking sound of bullets fired. The army was on exercise, near to where we prayed together for peace and reconciliation.



'...O let us not relive this dreadful war
let there compassion rule and be the guide
and unity the law for evermore.
The flag of brotherhood shall fly with pride
the truth shall dwell in every human's core;
in peace alone does happiness reside....'

(Gaspar Kvartio)

from the sculpture/installation with 70 peace doves

The beauty of the landscape and the beauty of the telling of the story became as one as we accompanied each other in solidarity. The generous giftedness of our SDE workshop-givers facilitated the processing of our own responses. We were offered understandings. These included Brief Pastoral Counselling, Understanding Stress, Crisis and Trauma, the possibility of Resiliency. Other workshops were about healing: Healing in Art, Architecture, Photography, Beauty and the Spiritual Exercises. Still others offered the sharing of ancient wisdoms of Story-telling and Healing, and the power of Dreams, another offered stories of healing by the Spirit's wisdom of the 'little' prophetic voice and 'Grace' in the New Testament. These workshops, early morning breath-body work and the prayerful morning gatherings enabled the pain to be expressed and articulated and so transformed.

Vulnerability and generosity, humility and pain, even grief were also part of our AGM and committee Election process. The Spirit rushed in and blew through proceedings. We thanked Maïke for the wonderful way she has sensitively steered the committee on behalf of SDE over the last three years.



We also offered heartfelt thanks to Judita who served tirelessly as the 4th member. Three members, Claudia, Rafaël Maria and Paula, generously put their names forward. We elected two new members to our committee. We welcomed Rafaël Maria as Chairperson and Paula as the 4th member, thanking Claudia, for her humble self-offering. The courageous generosity and vulnerable self-surrender of all our election candidates was felt acutely. It is with enormous gratitude and appreciation that we commend them all to the Lord, those who have served and those who offered to serve, elected or otherwise.

Saturday evening was spent in a more light-hearted way, with games and joke-telling. Latent talents were expressed and voices aired! Another, perhaps more serious, theological matter emerged in 'the Elephant in the Room' game. This points to the problematic issue of celebration of the Eucharist in an ecumenical gathering.

As we prepare to gather in Poland next year we will need to pray for awareness of each other's traditions, and the sensitivities within those traditions, including deeply held beliefs and practices. May we also pray for our host nation, the planning group, and the SDE committee.

May our prayer bring rich fruits and harmony in our diversity.

Mary Elizabeth Nono