

SDE GATHERING, MARCH 2 – 7, 2016, KIELCE, POLAND

Report by Pirkko Lehtiö and Tuula Sääksi

Participants: 37 people from 12 European countries (Denmark, Finland, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania, Moldova, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland) and the Fathers of the local host, Karczówka Monastery

Theme of the gathering: Building a Global Community, Seeking the Divine

The theme of the gathering started to realise already at the airport of Warsaw. First we met Valda, our friend from Lithuania. Little by little the group grew: friends from different countries came out from their planes and found each other. Some knew each other from before, some were included as newcomers to the community.

The taste of the local community reached us in the friendly face of Father Rafal, who so warmly welcomed us and led our way to the bus. After three hours' busride we arrived to the Karczówka monastery, which is situated on a high hill, in the middle of the city of Kielce.

Karczówka monastery

The deep meaning of a community was revealed to us in the warm words and actions of Father Rector Jan Oleszko (House Superior). He welcomed the SDE people to stay in the monastery. As a concrete token of his welcoming words he gave the key of the monastery to Rafaël Maria Theuvenet, the chair of the SDE. We were received as brothers and sisters in Christ. With sincere gratitude Rafaël Maria received this gift and led us safely and warmly throughout these days.



Father Jan told us how he had started to learn making pottery. The beautiful product of his skilful hands was placed in the middle of our meeting-room. Every day we gathered around this piece of art, "Last Supper": thirteen figures (candle-holders) fixed on a board, one of them white, straight and big, the other twelve brown, crooked and slanted in many ways, symbolizing the twelve disciples, gathered around Christ. Looking at this "Last Supper" every day strengthened and deepened our understanding of the community and reminded us about the foundation of our faith. We were representing a whole variety of human beings, crooked and broken, but still being called by Christ to be one in him.

Father Jan together with Father Wojciech (Wojtek) Drazek and Father Rafal Holubowski were tirelessly and lovingly serving and helping us throughout the meeting-days, together with the friends who worked in the kitchen.

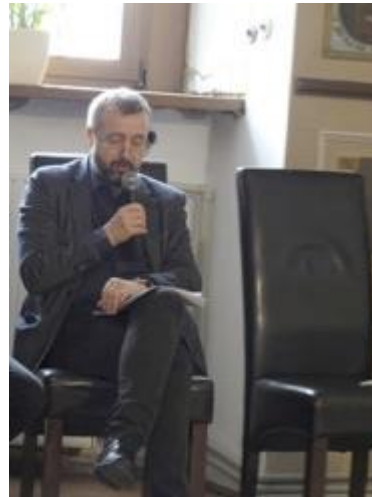
The monastery has a long history, dating back to the 17th century. It has gone through many different, difficult, even horrible periods during the centuries. In 1957 The Pallotine fathers were invited to take over the responsibility of running the place.

Today the Pallotine fathers in Karczówka monastery concentrate in spirituality, especially in giving Lectio Divina -retreats. Another area of concentration is dialogue between different denominations and religions. The dialogue-centre is supported also by EU.

Polish history and spirituality

Father Jan and Mr. Bogdan Bialek (psychologist and chair of Jan Karski Society and vice-chair of the Polish Christian-Jewish Council) gave us presentations in which they shared with us glimpses about the history and spirituality of Poland.

It was especially touching to hear about the relationship between Polish and Jewish people during the history and nowadays.



Trip

On Friday morning the whole group climbed down the hill and entered the bus which took us on a trip. The destination was the mountains and the National park of Holy Cross (Swietokrzyskie), named so after the shrine of the Holy Cross, which stands on the hill in the middle of the park. Unfortunately the day was foggy and the scenery was covered by mist, so we missed the beautiful view.



Instead we saw and sensed the beauties inside the shrine. The shrine is famous for the relics of the Lord's cross. Five little pieces of wood, immersed into a gold double-armed cross, have been worshipped here, in the oldest Polish sanctuary, as a priceless treasure, and thousands of people keep coming here from near and far.

Beginning from the 11th century there was a Benedictine monastery at the place. Even here the monastery has gone through many painful periods, attacks, invasions, disasters. Since last century the monastery and the care of the relics of the holy cross were handed over to the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. They carry on the heavy burden of the restoration of the place.

We were given a thorough explanation about the history and meaning of the relics, the work of the monastery, the art of the place etc. We were even invited to have a cup of tea inside the premises of the monastery.

Morning prayers

The morning prayers on different days were led by the friends from Hungary, Mary Nono, Peder Poulsen and Yvonne Walker.

We were inspired by music and pictures, passages from the Bible and songs, invited to look at the wonders of the universe, ourselves as human beings, created by God, loved by Him. We were invited

to pray for each other, our communities, churches and nations, as well as for many burning issues of today, refugees, ecological issues, peace, etc.



Quiet day

The quiet day was meant for individual spirituality. The rose-garden, still sleeping in winter torpor, and other surroundings of the monastery were offering peace and tranquillity for silent meditation. Signs and promises of new spring were sensed both in birds' singing and delicate little buds on the trees and bushes.

Eucharists

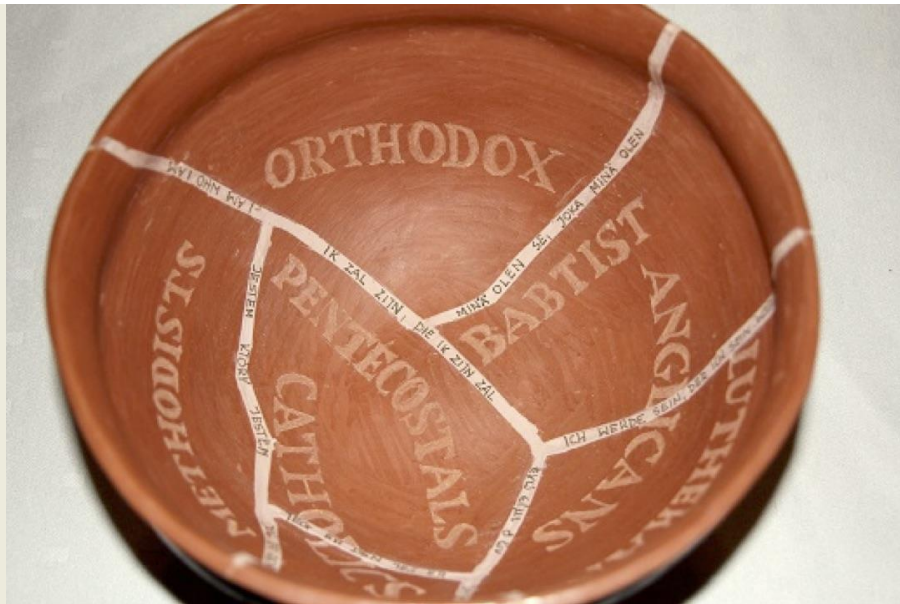
The Eucharist services were led in ecumenical spirit, following different traditions of our churches. Those serving in these Eucharists were Päivi Vuorilehto and Sirkka-Liisa Raunio, Sigurd Bakke, Vigfús Ingvar Ingvarsson, Wojciech Drazek and Rafal Holubowski.



It also needs to be mentioned that Ulla Käll with her guitar brought a most beautiful atmosphere in the Eucharists and other meetings.

There was a deeply touching moment in the silent Eucharist. The bowl containing the blessed bread was handed over from person to person in silence. Every person, when receiving the bread, broke it and ate. The sound of breaking the bread was the only sound to be heard – a deep remembrance of the brokenness of ourselves, the world, and Our Lord Jesus Christ for us.

In the closing Eucharist a special symbol of community was shared again. A clay-bowl, made by Father Jan, was given to the Great Britain friends, representing the organizers of the next SDE meeting. The bowl had been broken, but glued again together from pieces. It contained the names of different Christian denominations, and on the glue there was the name of God written in many languages. The bowl was going round, from hand to hand, and everyone had a chance to hold it, feel the clay and see the writings inside the bowl.



Workshops

On Friday afternoon the participants had a chance to choose between six workshops. Here is the list of the workshops:

Valfrid Botnen was sharing in her workshop her experience from "Spiritual direction in groups".
Seamus Cullen and Wojciech Drazek gave a workshop on "Spiritual guidance and contemplative dimension of the Gospel".

Kazimierz Stasiak and Rafal Holubowski shared in their workshop experiences about "The practice of Lectio Divina and spiritual direction".

Paul Booth's title for the workshop was "Seeking the divine in the ordinary".

Aija Kaartinen offered the workshop on the topic: "From division to listening communication".

Una Agnew's title for the workshop was "Spirituality through poetry".

The two fathers, Rafal and Kazimierz, gave interesting information about Lectio Divina and how it has been developed and used in spiritual guidance by the Pallotine Fathers and especially in the monastery.

On Sunday afternoon we heard four presentations which again increased our knowledge of different forms of spiritual guidance, used in different countries and churches.

Valda Sadzeviciute spoke about Ignatian spirituality, Fr Rafal about Lectio Divina, Antoinette van Gulp about the spirituality of Teresa of Avila and Maike Ewert about contemplative prayer as spiritual direction. Some of these presentations were theoretical information, some were leading the participants to taste it in practice.



Triads

One part of the SDE meeting has been the so called triads. The purpose of the triads is to give the participants individual, personal spiritual direction, because there are spiritual directors who do not have this opportunity in their own churches or countries. It may also serve as training, as everyone takes different roles during the triad (sharer, listener, observer).

AGM

The contents of the AGM are available in the minutes of the meeting.

We only want to say that the meetings was very well prepared and organized. The outgoing treasurer Valfrid Botnen was given thanks for her faithful and devoted service and the new elected treasurer Elemér Vizi was welcomed on board.

Body building

Early birds met in the mornings to practice body work, led by Maike Ewert.

Otherwise body-building was taken care of by the excellent kitchen-personnel. We enjoyed different kinds of tasty food with most friendly service.



Social evenings

Every evening the White Room was filled with lively discussions, exchange of experiences, sharing of thoughts, singing, dancing, laughing – and endless variety of sweets, chocolates, cakes, cheese, wine, biscuits, tea, coffee etc.

Returning to the foundations

The final act of the community building was to return to the foundations. The whole group went out to the courtyard of the monastery and gathered around the statue of the famous Father Kolombin of the monastery, to be photographed

with him. For fifty years this father lived alone in the monastery, being the only one who survived the persecutions of the 19th century. He stayed there fearlessly and waited faithfully for the people who would come to confess their sins and hear the absolution. Living alone there he was a strong witness to the loving Father and reminded the whole community that God never fails nor abandons.



Now the SDE community members gathered around his statue with love, joy and gratitude.