

Programmatic Working Group and Network

At the ERA last year, a new Working Group was born, which will look at questions of Christian and Student identity

"In a context of secularisation, and at the same time an increasing fundamentalism, we have to point out our Christian identity. We are all members of the body of Christ, the Church. Therefore we try in everyday life to give a testimony in agreement with this fact. Our care about social matters is conceived as a ministry to our neighbours, a "prolongation" of the Eucharist in our daily life. We want to show that Christianity is not only a redeeming way of life from the past, but can also be a factor of maintaining life in our time.

We also have to point out our student identity in a context that is dramatically changing: growing privatisation of the educational sector, specialisation, decrease in academic freedom, reduction of study time, market-oriented education, preferential funding for technical and economic subjects at the cost of humanities subjects..."

The statement above was made by the ERA in Hirschluch, Germany, in August 1991 as a part of the decision to form a Programmatic Working Group (PWG). The ERA also stated that "during recent years we have noticed that SCMs are in a crisis: students are less interested in political and religious issues. At the same time new religious and fundamentalist movements are increasing."

The former Theological Working Group (TWG) experienced a vast distance between the TWG and the national movements. Through widening the task and transforming TWG into PWG, the ERA hoped, and ERC hopes, that we will increase our ability to strengthen the ideological and theological work of the federation. The lack of identity, as we see it, points out an urgent need for a basic discussion about the aims of SCMs

and WSCF work today.

The aim of the Programmatic work will be to start a process in WSCF-Europe about the issues of identity and self-understanding, where the national SCMs will be actively involved. As far as possible, the PWG will coordinate an already-ongoing work in the different SCMs. Each SCM will also be free to choose its own perspective for its own work.

The first challenge for the PWG is the ongoing process to establish a forum among our SCMs, which will include the PWG (four members) and representatives from each national movement. They will (hopefully) commit themselves to encourage and stimulate a discussion in the national movements, concerning the aims of the work of WSCF in terms of Christian and student identity. The PWG will work as a coordinator in this network, through which national contributions to the discussion will be distributed to the SCMs. PWG will also use MOZAIK for publishing articles.

Finally, my hope is that we in the programmatic process will cope with the fact that young people do not feel at home in, and leave, our traditional churches. Will we, as members in our different SCMs, continue in our church involvement when we have finished our studies or will we not? Which role do we play as SCMs and WSCF in this alienation?

Résumé en Français

A propos d'une citation du ERA (European Regional Assembly) à Hirschluch en Allemagne Anders Wesslund explique pourquoi le ERA a décidé de transformer le groupe de travail théologique en groupe de travail programmatique (PWG). Ce dernier a un but beaucoup plus vaste.

Le ERA se fait du souci à cause de la sécularisation et du fondamentalisme croissants. Les mouvements chrétiens se trouvent dans une situation pénible; les étudiants semblent de moins en moins intéressés aux questions politiques et religieuses alors que le nombre de nouveaux mouvements religieux et fondamentalistes augmente.

L'ancien groupe de travail théologique avait remarqué une grande distance entre elle et les mouvements nationaux. Par élargir les tâches du nouveau groupe de travail on espère d'avoir plus de possibilités pour renforcer le travail idéologiques et théologiques de la fédération. Le manque d'identité montre qu'un nou-

veau débat sur les buts des mouvements étudiants et WSCF est nécessaire.

L'intention du PWG est de remettre en cause les questions de l'identité et de la compréhension de soi en association active avec les mouvements nationaux. Le PWG essaye de coordonner et d'activer le débat internationale sur le travail et les objectives du WSCF en terme de l'identité étudiante et chrétienne. Pour cela un forum sera établi qui consiste en membres des mouvements nationaux et du PWG.

Finalement Anders Wesslund espère que pendant le débat on traitera aussi le problème des jeunes gens qui se sentent aliénés et quittent L'Eglise. Qu'est-ce que le rôle des mouvements étudiants et du WSCF dans cette aliénation ?

En Mars 1992 une conférence sur ce thème aura lieu à Strasbourg. Si vous vous sentez encouragés, contactez votre mouvement national ou le bureau du WSCF à Amsterdam.

Vous êtes invités à joindre le dialogue!

When you read this, the PWG will hopefully have met for the first time in Amsterdam, and even a first preparatory meeting about the Education Conference in Strasbourg in March will have been held. This conference will focus on the issues of education men-

tioned above as well as the growing political and religious fundamentalism. If you feel encouraged or challenged yourself to participate in this process, please contact your national movement or the WSCF office in Amsterdam. They will give you further information.

Welcome to the dialogue!

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Eastern Europe Project

Now in its third year, the Eastern Europe Project is increasing its work with the movements of the East of the Region. The next phase, starting this year, will involve language and leadership training

Since November 1989, when the Eastern Europe Project was established, several events have taken place, including three Support Group meetings. The Support Group is a group of representatives of all the Eastern European countries who meet, exchange ideas and support each other. Representatives to these meetings have come from Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Eastern Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Russia; observers have come from the WSCF-Europe office, the European Regional Committee and the WSCF Inter-Regional office. The most recent of these meetings took place in Moscow - the first WSCF meeting there since before the 1917 revolution!

Workcamps

Another part of the project has been two workcamps in Bialowieza, Poland, combining language training with practical construction work. These have involved people from Poland, Romania, East Germany, and the then Soviet Union, with students from Great Britain providing English conversation. We plan to continue these workcamps in different countries.

The Eastern Europe project includes many small local groups as in other countries and encourages their participation in various ecumenical conferences and meetings, both in Eastern Europe and in other parts of the world. The Eastern Europe Project will continue to encourage these activities with growing participation of Eastern European countries in WSCF and other ecumenical activities.

Leadership Training

One way in which we are going to help with this is to expand the Eastern Europe Project, and indeed to start a new project. Two issues which have been discussed at Support Group meetings are Language and Leadership skills, so WSCF is starting an Eastern Europe Language and Leadership Training Project in February of this year. There is already good cooperation from Syndesmos (the World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth) and the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe, and we will work closely with them on this project.

British SCM is keen to be involved in this project, so the starting language is English and the project coordinator will be based in Britain with strong links to

the Eastern Europe office. It will have two parts - one in Eastern Europe (several courses) and one in Britain, and both will include Language and Leadership training as well as East-West dialogue and cultural activities.

Other activities within the Eastern Europe Project include: exchanges between groups within Eastern Europe to learn about the different situations and to exchange information; a newsletter in conjunction with the Orthodox Youth Circle, to give information about events in Eastern Europe; network building and making contacts with new groups. Much is being done to promote ecumenism in Eastern Europe.

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