

Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe: 23rd General Meeting 6-12 October 1991: Grand St. Bernard, Switzerland

"Christ Became Poor For Our Sake"

The 23rd General Meeting of EYCE took place in an 11th Century Monastery 2475m above sea level in the heights of the Swiss Alps. For a low-country dweller like myself, this was quite an experience, particularly when we had to spend the first night in a hostel at the foot of the pass, which was blocked by snow. However, this was a good opportunity to talk to those involved in ecumenical youth work in Europe, and over the week some interesting discussions took place.

My greatest problem was that only having been involved in WSCF for a few weeks then (!), there were still some things I was not clear about - in particular the Latin project and EGGYS - and despite the Student Intern, Becky Brannan's, frantic faxing, I still felt uncomfortable about quite a lot of the things I was meant to know about. This was not too much of a problem in the end, I think, but I would have felt a lot happier had I had a bit more information.

I'm still not sure quite how EYCE actually operates - and from talking to other participants, that seemed to be fairly com-

mon. The conference theme, "Christ became poor for our sake", despite two excellent speakers, was quickly pushed aside in favour of business. Much of this was done in small working groups, who all produced a report. The problem with this is that no one aspect of an organisation exists on its own, and the groups had so little contact with each other that discussions were being duplicated, time was wasted, and people as resources were under-used. For instance, I joined the programme/camps working group, feeling it would probably be the most relevant, and had to spend a great deal of time trying to find out where other issues affecting WSCF were being dealt with. Despite having given my greeting on the first day, people were still coming up to me at the end of the week and saying, "Oh! We didn't realise there was anyone here from WSCF. We would have asked you about x or y ...". With virtually no central co-ordination, it all became very frustrating, a feeling shared by a large number of the participants.

The other very frustrating thing was the fact that nearly two days were taken up with constitutional

amendments (and amendments to amendments to amendments ...); given that only one and a half hours had been allowed for this, it meant that many of the reports were given only a cursory reading, and important business was delegated to the ExCo to deal with at a later date. I was left feeling "Why have I been here?", as WSCF-connected things were written off the agenda along with everything else.

As far as direct cooperation goes, the East Europe Project seems to be one of the more major things. EYCE have provisionally agreed to give SF10,000 to the project for each of the next two years - negotiable according to the input from WSCF, British SCM and Syndesmos. Despite getting some very negative comments from some people there, the project was not raised for discussion, but was just included on the programme listing. They have decided to postpone any possible team visits to Portugal or Spain until 1993-94, for financial reasons. Women's work did not come up, beyond an agreement to form an EYCE interim working group. Brazil (EGGYS) too was a side issue, and although the Prague working group came up with some interesting ideas, such as the

creation of a "monitoring group" with WSCF and Syndesmos, made up of 21 young people from different countries and denominations, this did not seem to be something I could comment on, as it will be taken to the next Council of European Churches (CEC) planning meeting for further discussion. Any cooperation in this area obviously seems to be a good thing.

So by and large, it was an interesting experience. I think, overall, that it was useful for WSCF Europe to have someone there, even if I had some doubts at the time! It made me realise the efficiency of our organisation, but as an outsider to EYCE, it made me very aware of the need for good communication and information, something as relevant to us as it is to them. I feel that they have some major problems with their structure and their overall aims, but as long as we can continue to have some mutually beneficial effect on each other it is a cooperation with which it seems to be worth continuing.

JOANNAPIETERS
SCM of Britain

Durham

European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society September 1991: Brussels

"The New Challenges of the European' Community"

At the beginning of September, I set off for Brussels to represent WSCF at a consultation of the EECCS. When I arrived at the hotel

where the Consultation was to take place, I was greeted by the General Secretary of EECCS, Keith Jenkins, with the words, "At a guess, you

must be Becky Brannan from WSCF." Little did I realise the significance of this remark. It was soon to become evident...

Having just spent two weeks at the European Regional Assembly at Hirschluch with an international group of students,

it was a bit of a shock suddenly to be faced with a conference full of grey-suited, middle-aged men. I'd forgotten that this was what the Church was like. I felt very young and very female!

There were almost four men to every woman, and more than 90 over 30s to one under 30.

It might do WSCF well to have conferences like this one - we stayed in a rather nice hotel in the centre of Brussels, we had our meetings in a "proper" conference room with 4 closed booths for the interpreters, rather hi-tech interpretation equipment a comfortable chair and desk for everyone, fully equipped with conference headed notepaper, complimentary pens, caraffes of water and mint chocolates to nibble on when the speakers got boring.

But for all these trimmings, they still managed to be behind time with their mailings - I did not receive the conference material until I got there, and was then left about half an hour to read it before we started discussions! It's as well I'm used to that. However, the rest of the conference seemed

rather more organised and timetables were fairly strictly adhered to.

The opening session, presented by Bob Goudzwaard, who was very interesting, posed a lot of questions about the whole issue of Europe and the European community, and was a promising introduction to the conference, despite some quite heavy and difficult concepts. Unfortunately, there was very little time to ask questions or discuss this until the second part of the next morning, by which time we had already had a "difficult" Bible study and time to be distracted from the impact of the speech. By this time people were more interested in getting into the working groups.

The majority of the rest of the conference was spent in these working groups. I was assigned to the group on "Who decides in Europe?" which really meant "Who does not decide in Europe?" We had two pieces of input to stimulate our discussion. The first was from a European Community lawyer, who made a lot of interesting points about who does and who does not have rights and what should be done to make a more just system, but most of this was

wrapped up in very technical jargon, making it very difficult to concentrate on. Thus the discussion about it became very boring and people showed a general lack of interest. The second input was far more interesting and could have been very stimulating but for the general apathy of the group. I felt that the group was too big for people really to get a discussion going, and this, together with the use of translators and a warm room, caused one or two to nod off. I gather that other working groups were far more animated and interesting, but they were also far smaller.

On one evening we had a round table "animated by theologians". The speakers were very interesting with quite diverse experiences of social issues inside and outside Europe. A very creative and constructive discussion was started and I felt that this was where the conference should have been all along. However, time was running out and we were not allowed to continue. The momentum was lost, no more time was given to this and the conference slipped back into apathy (at least for those who didn't want to decide in Europe!).

Conclusion I came away from the conference feeling quite disconcerted with the churches and with the European Community. I found staying in an expensive hotel and discussing social injustice sickening. In many ways the conference was an excuse for European Ecumenical hacks to meet up with each other again, and for the churches to say "we're discussing the "Challenges of the European Community"" and then to be able to forget about it.

The conference was good for two things: one was that I learnt quite a lot about the way things work in the European Community - there was a very informative talk given by my own Member of the European Parliament; the other was making contacts and raising the awareness of WSCF with those with financial influence in the churches, ie. the "people that matter".

One other thing, I realised that disorganisation is not only a WSCF or youth speciality!!

BECKY BRANNAN
WSCF Europe Office

Amsterdam

Syndesmos IVth International Orthodox Youth Festival 26 August-1 September 1991: Makri, Alexandroupolis, Greece

"For the Life of the World"

The final act of the Syndesmos Festival will stay with me for a very long time. As we gathered in the small chapel in the monastery of Makri village, Alexandroupolis, for the all night vigil, I knew I was going to be in for a long night. As a Protestant - used more to the sounds of a monotone (male) voice preaching from a pulpit, songs in one

language, usually my mother tongue, and bare walls in the church I was overawed by the smells, music, mystery, symbolism, jewels, chanting, wonder and sheer brilliance of the Orthodox at worship. Luckily I had a copy of the Divine Liturgy in English thrust into my hand: otherwise I would have been completely lost in the utter Babel of languages that was used.

The fact that I was able to follow, and thus participate in the worship so fully meant that the pain of being separated by the Eucharist at the end was all the more poignant. We were separated by history, tradition, dogmas, schisms and linguistic interpretations. These human elements divided us, and caused pain. Yet I believe that the Divine elements pre-

sent with us all in that worship, the elements of love, struggle, justice, patience, honesty and care are the elements that must sustain and nourish us, when we are unable to share the nourishment of the Lord's Supper, as we search for ways forward in our ecumenical debate. The Festival was more, however, than one all-night vigil.