

A Sip of Frascati

After being on the ERC for two years, until Hirschluch, Caroline Bailey, and Hannes Ungar, look back

"Sip Frascati among friends in Florence..." the leaflet said. Then underneath in smaller print, "The European Regional Assembly of the World Student Christian Federation, Florence, November 1989". The reality was somewhat different to what I had imagined ... days crammed with meetings, everything in three languages, voting on issues that were cloudy to my uninitiated mind, to say the least. Then returning home in a daze, elected to be on a committee, feeling daunted, inadequate, and most of all, not quite sure if they hadn't got the wrong person by mistake.

This continued for some time. At the first meeting in Amsterdam I felt very young and inexperienced, responsible for such weighty matters as the appointment of the next Regional Secretary. But the frothy blossom on the trees in spring-time Amsterdam somehow boded well. There was promise and potential in what we were doing - planting things is often the most arduous and arid of tasks, always waiting, waiting for the results.

ERC Togetherness

Between meetings, being a member of the ERC seemed a strange and very distant memory: I felt constantly that I should be doing more, taking my responsibility more seriously. My studies really prevented me doing much at all, though I did eventually design the new WSCF-Europe leaflet, but even with the great support of British SCM I often felt very isolated and alone.

The came Sopron, Hungary, in January 1990, and everything changed. Just when I was least expecting it, being on the ERC became a wonderful thing that empowered me and enabled

me to empower other people. I felt able to contribute more effectively and offer useful comments and information.

This was mainly because we spent much more time together as a group and got to know each other better, living and working together in a beautiful white church centre on top of a wooded hill. Each night we'd climb the hill behind the house to look at the stars, incredibly bright and clear in the frosty weather. These are the moments I really treasure - there are not so many people with whom I could look at the stars in such harmony. It also seems an appropriate metaphor for the work of the ERC: the upward climb was difficult and we needed each other's support to keep going, but how bright the stars are when we reach the top!

Hirschluch

After this meeting a lot of our work was concerned with preparing for the next European Regional Assembly in Hirschluch, in the former DDR. As the first meeting in Eastern Europe for a long time this was something of a symbol of the changes that have taken place during our time as ERC. This is also true of the growth of the Eastern Europe Project of WSCF, with which I had some involvement as I participated in the workcamp we organised in Poland. And later, the ERA saw the largest participation of Eastern European students for many years.

At the ERA I had the rather pleasant job of worship coordinator and during all its hassle I had some opportunity to look back and compare myself with the person who had sought Frascati in Florence and found ... well, something rather different. One of the most obvious things is the acquisition of a circle of wonderful friends from the committee,

all around Europe. People with whom I will always share the deep sense of community that working together brings. Perhaps stronger is that sense that starving together brings (all the time). I have also found new confidence, determination and even patience over these last two years. In Hirschluch I chaired a huge plenary session which is something I would never have been able to do in Florence (despite the Frascati).

That International Feeling

What also became apparent to me in Hirschluch was that I no longer feel so desperately 'British'. That is not to say that I do not care about my country (how it makes me weep!) but as I sat at the party or spoke in a plenary I did not feel more affinity with the British delegates than anyone else, as I once would have done. Rather the people I felt most close to were those I had worked with over the last two years. Explaining this to the former chairperson, she said "Caroline, you have passed your Leadership Training!" Such an overcoming of national boundaries, an international community, is something WSCF should always aspire to, whilst not losing the riches that identities can bring.

The other realisation I came to was the power and responsibility one has in participating in a meeting like the ERA. Here one can basically put forward a recommendation on any topic or issue and stand a good chance of gaining the support of a European organisation. Suddenly one begins to see that the dreaded feeling of impotent apathy that British universities seem to ooze is actually a false one, a delusion. We do have the power and the ability to change things. Sometimes in WSCF it is our inspiration that is lacking.

For me one of the most important results of the ERA was the validation of a very good recommendation of women's work which has always been close to my heart. Also the effort to spread out the work more, to involve more committed people outside the ERC in the massive amount of work there is to do.

Passing On The Candle

What continue to amaze me is that one can never know what the results of what one does will be. It is like a small candle passed from hand to hand. Sometimes it splutters and dies but then in the most surprising moments it burns steadily and passed on, can light the way for someone

many miles away. Its an old metaphor and not very original. The Big E I (1989) inspired people in the US to resuscitate the Ecumenical Movement there. I met Christiane Kemmler in when she studied in Norwich and now she has become Women's Coordinator on the ERC.

Because we never know and we

never can know what consequences our tiny actions can have, we have to struggle in the dark, stumbling around, hopping, waiting, praying, doing as much as we can, doing what we feel is right. I suppose that's what faith is all about and of all the journeys I have made while on the ERC this is the deepest. It is also the most difficult and the most

exhilarating, the most confusing and the most inspiring. I am grateful for the chance to experience it.

CAROLINE BAILEY
SCM of Britain

Norwich

Once Upon a Time...

... it came to pass that a train took me to the European Regional Assembly (ERA) in Florence, November 1989. As one of the Austrian delegates I was elected as a member of the Theological Working Group (TWG) and in this function in the European Regional Committee (ERC) too. Of course, I was shy and without experience of WSCF. Step by step, conference by conference, I learned more and more about the structures and the people. At the end of our term of office the former ERC didn't want to finish because we were well disposed towards each other. So much for human relations.

TWG

The TWG had a rather hard job: the task was not defined very clearly. There was no special Theological Conference scheduled, which we could have prepared. Therefore we decided to work on a Reader, dealing with the recommended themes: Fundamentalism and the crisis of absolute ideologies in general. (It has yet to be typed

and printed.) As we know from WSCF history, "Mission" formed something like an identity at the very beginning. On the way up to the present it changed several times and it is almost lost now. It is difficult if not impossible to find the "WSCF Theology". This is a general problem of the Federation. It works quite efficiently in comparison to similar councils. Almost everything is well organised, conferences are planned and held ... but, something is missing.

Education Now

It is not only because the Federation is not running right, but also due to the conservative educational policy we are faced with in Europe: limitation of university budgets, shortening of study time, numerus clausus, preference of technical and economic subjects over the humanities, etc. The consequences are visible in WSCF life: students are not concerned about politics anymore ("What Gulf Crisis?"), social changes, etc. Interests are limited to fun, parties, sports, cinema. These activities are also necessary, but they must not become the

main aim of WSCF. I hope that the newly constituted Programmatic Working Group will be able to contribute more on this problematic issue. (Good luck!)

Conclusion

Some final remarks: being involved in such an organisation does not necessarily mean that you have to neglect your studies. I did so voluntarily. And now, rich in international experiences (not affairs!), with the good feeling of having been seen the world I postponed my final exams, resurrected and lengthened my student life: I started with another subject it will take me another four, five years.

Perhaps I have not changed WSCF Europe very much but it has changed my life, at least for two years!

HANNES UNGAR
ESGiÖ
SCM of Austria

Vienna