



## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **President of Ireland meets European Chaplains**

Chaplaincy representatives from all over Europe gathered together in Dublin from 1-5 September 2004 for the 8<sup>th</sup> Consultation of the European Network of Health Care Chaplaincy.

The President of Ireland, Mrs Mary McAleese formally opened the meeting. Welcoming the visitors to Dublin, she said, "The existential and spiritual dimension of suffering, illness and death is as real as the physical pain. It creates a very testing and challenging set of needs and you are the people who have responded to that challenge. Your skills offer the chance for peace of mind, for healing of a different sort, for empathy and company on the lonely journey that illness can be." She applauded "the ecumenical spirit" in which the representatives gathered together.

Also honouring the Network with their presence were the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, the Most Reverend Diarmuid Martin, and the Anglican Archbishop of the Church of Ireland, The Most Reverend John Robert Winder Neill, together with other religious leaders of Dublin.

The Network is an ecumenical body which is composed of faiths, denominations and organizations, which provide pastoral care in hospitals and various health care facilities. Bringing together the various chaplaincy experiences of all the health care systems in Europe, it aims to bring mutual sharing and understanding both on a religious, cultural and organizational level. Thirty-six participants came to Dublin from 23 countries, from as far away as Finland in the north to Greece in the south, from Ireland in the west to Bulgaria in the east.

Participants shared their diverse experiences of their countries and explored ways to build bridges to those who work in and manage healthcare systems, to church leaders and to the European Union at large. Although coming from so many different places and situations the participants discovered how much they had in common.

The Network elected Fr Stavros Kofinas, representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church, as Coordinator for the next two years. Fr Kofinas has been a leading light in enabling the Network to grow over the past few years, working tirelessly to make contacts with leaders all over Europe. As would be expected from such a European wide organisation, the Network Committee consists of representatives from Belgium, Finland, Ireland, Scotland, the Netherlands and Portugal.

Participants left Dublin energized not only by their discussions but by the wonderful Irish hospitality received at All Hallows College. The next consultation will take place in Lisbon, Portugal in 2006.

*European Network of Health Care  
Chaplaincy  
Meeting at Dublin, Ireland  
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