

Closing Statements of the Anniversary Consultation

As I stated in the opening ceremony, the past ten years have been a journey, a personal one for me and for many others here and a collective one for us all. Whatever has been accomplished over the past 20 years of European chaplaincy and 10 years of Networking is due to the contributions made by each and every one of you, your predecessors and your respective chaplaincies. Without these contributions, we would not have developed, grown and matured in the way we did. It is because of your continual interest that I am confident that we will continue to do grow. I truly believe that we are where we are in our journey because of our commitment to one another and the commitment we have as caregivers, which has allowed God's grace to bless us in a special ways.

Here, I would like to again thank all the former organizers of our previous consultations: Kirsti Aalto from Finland, Kathleen O' Connor from Ireland, Fr. Nuno from Portugal, Naathan Haamer from Estonia and Debbie Hodge here in London. Needless to say, without them, we would not have been able to meet in the way we did.

It is only fitting that I also thank all the others that also served over the past ten years on the Network Committee:

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| 1. Michael | Möller-Herr | Germany |
| 2. Anne | Vandenhoeck | Belgium |
| 3. Kathrin | Jahns | Germany |
| 4. Dana | Kalnina-Zake | Latvia |
| 5. Marlène | Inauen | Switzerland |
| 6. Edward | Lewis | UK,England |
| 7. Derek | Brown | UK,Scotland |
| 8. Axel | Liégeois | Belgium |
| 9. Anneke | Kemper | Netherlands |

Anneke and Fr. Nuno have been with us since Dublin. They will no longer be formal representatives of their respective organizations to the ENHCC, but I would like to especially thank them, letting them know that they will remain very dear in our hearts.

All of these Committee members brought in a very valuable perspective. The times we met in Dublin, Leuven and Istanbul were times of true friendship and mutual bonding. I personally will cherish those times together.

But at this, our Anniversary Consultation, I would like to make a special recognition to the one person that has been an inspiration to us all: our lovely Kirsti Aalto. Kirsti, you have been a living example and expression of care, a resource of love, prudence and wisdom. Allow me to personal state that you are one of my dearest friends and I can say without a doubt that many in our Network share this feeling as well. For this reason, in great gratitude for your person, your presence and participation and all that you have done, I would like to make you an honorary participant of your Network, offering to you this plaque as a token of our appreciation.

There are no words to describe the work that our webmaster Fred Coutts has done for us over the past ten years. Fred, your patience, discreetness, gentleness and foresight is a light of joy and hope for the Network. As I said at the beginning of the Consultation, we would not have been a Network without you. Once I tried counting how many emails we had exchanged over a two year period of time and I think that I lost count after something like 800. You too have become a real friend for me and for us all. In one year, you will retire, but your energy will continue to keep us motivated, bringing us together in your special way. Although you will continue serving us, at least for the some time more, I would like to present you with this special plaque, thanking you for these past ten years of service

Now it is time for me to say goodbye to you as coordinator. In 1998 in Rome, when I attended the Consultation for Hospital Chaplaincy for my first time, I did not know any of the members that were there. In many ways, I felt like a stranger. Today, after twelve years of involvement in what now is our European Network, many of the dearest friends in my life are in this room. The journey that was started then has been a creative one, full of unexpected surprises and joys. I can honestly say that this journey occupied a great deal of my life. As my wife likes to say with humorous pride, every time I was elected coordinator she got to know the back of my head a little bit better because I was always at the computer emailing and planning, researching and writing. Again, citing Homer's *Odyssey*: "Many cities did I visit, and many were the nations with whose manners and customs did I become acquainted..." But more important, many are the people that I did meet, did I grow to love and who expressed their love to me. In the Network I learned to give and to receive. For all this, I feel truly blessed and am humbly thankful. At each conclusion of our consultations, I felt a little more humble. When you remain alone, you can feel that you are something great. When you are a part of something much bigger than you, you have to put yourself in a humble perspective. I felt this when Rune Forsbeck, at the conclusion of the first ENHCC consultation in Crete, presented me with a glass cross, the symbol of the chaplaincy of Sweden. I especially felt this when Naathan, in our last

Consultation in Estonia, presented me with a beautiful hand painted icon of Christ. Both have a significant place in my house. I also felt this last night with the book our new Coordinator presented me. I will not be leaving the ENHCC, as I will continue representing the Ecumenical Patriarchate, being that I am the Coordinator of its new Network for Pastoral Health Care. Many of you have asked me how I feel about stepping down from my position as coordinator, if I felt sad or relieved. My answer is that I feel content. It is like seeing a dream that came true. I must also add that I feel very loved. I can assure you that I will take your love with me throughout all the journeys of my life. For true relationships never end. As I told a very dear person here last night, sometimes love cannot be expressed in words. It can only be expressed in the silence of co-existing. You are all very dear to me. I shall say no more other than to thank you for your love, praying that we, all together, will continue our journey.

TO THE NEW COORDINATOR

Anne,

I was moved in nominating you last night because I was the one that first nominated you in Dublin to become a member of the Network Committee. I have no doubt that you will succeed. Presenting you with this plaque, I will end this consultation with the way I began it, rephrasing the poem I recited at the opening ceremony to fit the occasion.

*“As you set out for Ithaka
hope the voyage is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.
You will encounter many difficulties but don't be afraid of them:
as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,
as long as a rare excitement
stirs your spirit and your body
they will not dishearten you.
Do not bring these difficulties inside your soul.
Do not set them up in front of you.
God's grace will be with you and guide you.*

*Hope the voyage is a long one.
May there be many a summer morning when,
with what pleasure, what joy,
you come into harbors seen for the first time;
may you stop at Phoenician trading stations
to buy fine things,*

*mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
sensual perfume of every kind that attract others to gather together and express love—
and may you visit many Egyptian cities
to gather stores of knowledge from their scholars.*

*Keep Ithaca always in your mind.
Arriving there is what you are destined for.
But do not hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for years,
so you are old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you have gained on the way.
For this Ithica will make you rich.*

*Ithaka will give you the marvelous journey.
Without her you would not have set out.*

*Wise you will become, so full of experience.
And at the end, you will have understood by then what this Ithaka really means.”*