

**Report on the meeting of
The European Federation of Married Priests
9-10 July 2008**

Ten delegates of the married priests' groups in Europe met in Brussels last July: Only the Italians were unable to send a representative. However, one of us will represent the federation in Rome on the 5-7 of next September when the Italian group, Vocatio, celebrates its 30th. anniversary.

The Groups in 2008

The first part of the meeting was devoted to sharing information on the activities and situation of our groups. In spite of the peculiarities of each country and of each group, we share many preoccupations and questions: It seemed useful to list these, to hear suggestions from each other and to affirm our solidarity.

1. We are concerned by the ever deepening pitiful situation of lack of clergy. What should be the response to that which not only respects but involves the 'communities' of believers? It should certainly not be that of importing priests from other countries or keeping with us those who came to study. Serious researches should be launched which would open up future prospects for ministries, taking into account that which is alive and well at grass roots. Relative to this we support completely the document of the Dutch Dominicans 'Kerk en Ambt'.
2. We experience the need, but also take pleasure in developing relations with, and in supporting, the networks which strengthen the interrelationships of all the groups, which we call 'The Church of the grass roots', for the renewal of all the communities of believers.
3. We are well aware that we no longer find ourselves in the same type of society and church as when we left ministry and that it is often a question today of rediscovering hope and of discerning new ways of developing our mission. How do we reformulate our new way of spiritual progress? How do we live in church, in community, in another fashion? How do we put an end to the dilemma of clericalism("That which is done without the priest has no value"; "Only that which is done by him has value") ? The services which we provide in the groups of which we are a part do they contribute to the growth of the communities?
4. We expressed our interest and sympathy in respect of the developments and difficulties of the Anglican Communion where there is no hesitation in courageously facing up to questions of gender and sexuality: In particular we think that it is our duty to reflect in our Roman Catholic Church its decision to ordain women bishops.
5. We are all confronted with the painful situations endured by the marginalised, especially immigrants: It is a structural reality with which in the future we shall always have to reckon.
6. Finally, we intend to offer opportunities to get together for those who are and feel themselves to be victims, especially of the laws of the Roman Catholic Church. Here, as in other areas, the quality of relations with the hierarchy varies greatly from one European country to another...

These exchanges allowed us to ascertain how far the general objectives and perspectives of the federation are well anchored in the reality of our lives and thus to reaffirm them without the least hesitation: Absolute priority of the person over the law; priority of communities over ministries; the exercise of participative democracy; solidarity with all struggles for justice.

The web site of the Federation

Among the concrete commitments undertaken at last year's reunion, the delegates assessed the value of setting up the web site of the European Federation. Today, after a long period of consultation, the web page of our federation has been designed and almost set up (<http://www.pretresmaries.eu/index temp.php?page=1>). The site will be multilingual (German, English, Spanish, French and Italian) and accessible at the five following addresses: VerheiratetPriester.eu – MarriedPriests.eu – SacerdotesCasados.eu – PretresMaries.eu – PretiSpostai.eu. There will be found in particular the presentations and contacts of the federation and of member groups, an indication of their own site when that exists, and pages of current events and reading material. A choice of articles and other publications produced by our members will take up most of the space, with summaries in other languages. A

regular electronic bulletin 'Ministerium Novum. European Series' will be sent starting this autumn to newsletter subscribers. The editor will be Claude Bertin (France).

To complete the fine tuning a division of tasks has been made in order to arrive in November at the definitive opening of the site. Each country has been asked to nominate someone accountable for its web pages. The collaboration of each group will allow us to select the articles which we wish to see on the site and/or to send via the electronic bulletin. The administration of the site is entrusted at the moment to Pierre Collet.

The legal position of married priests in society

This is another of our preoccupations formulated at the 2007 reunion. "In the different countries, from which the member groups of the European Federation come, there are quite different conditions in respect of unemployment, health insurance, old age benefits, the right to pension and retirement, a whole series of situations which priests who have left ministry must take into account. With the prospect that the European Union envisages a harmonisation of existing national rules in these areas, the data must be collected in the member countries of the European Federation, assembled and summarised in a comprehensive review".

Three dossiers, completed in Austria, Belgium and France, have already been presented. They could serve as a model to help other countries. With these documents we hope to draw up a global study and to be able to present it to the European Council.

The task is coordinated by Bernard Corbineau (F) and Paul Bourgeois (B).

Young priests are still leaving today

We have established that the haemorrhage continues, but that the sensibility of younger priests who leave ministry is quite different from our own and does not correspond to what we experienced. We must remain open and receptive and perhaps we can serve as a relay station for these younger married priests.

Ramon Ilario (S) will coordinate the contacts and we should communicate useful addresses to him.

Contacts with other federations and networks

Three lines of contact have been clarified:

- Our participation in the last annual meeting of '**Reseau European Eglises et Libertes**' at Strasbourg in May 2007 was important and has allowed us to restate and make more precise our collaboration with the other European reform movements. There we also met two representatives of the North Atlantic Federation *for a renewed Catholic priesthood* which has been accepted as a partner in the network. We ourselves have decided to continue our relationship with the European Network.
- Relationships with other federations of Roman Catholic married priests in the world, particularly in Latin America and in the Philippines. Ramon Ilario (Spain) will follow up these contacts.
- Following the evolution of the North Atlantic Federation in the direction of a much larger coordination with other groups, correspondence has been addressed to it noting this evolution, noting the questions that this poses for us in terms of the continuity and coherence of the confederation, and noting its intention to organise a conference at Vienna next November. The other federations will be informed of this correspondence.

A Provocative Question?

The 2007 meeting terminated with expressing the desire to study thoroughly the question of the formulation of our faith and of our spirituality, and we should speak in this respect of our proximity to the grass root movements and to, for example, the movement 'We are Church'. Since then the Dutch document 'Kerk en Ambt' and, inversely, the takeover by the very clerical hands of the hierarchy provokes us more and more to pose the question: "What is a priest?" This question is not only and not primarily theological, but certainly very concrete and very pastoral, while it at the same time evokes in each of us and around us echoes which are very personal and very passionate. Obviously we have not drawn any conclusions from these exchanges....

Election of Officers

President: Pierre Collet (Belgium); secretary: Ramon Ilario (Spain); Treasurer: Jean Combe (France).