

Reunion of the European Federation of Catholic Married Priests

Brussels 7-9th. June 2013

Provisional Report

As agreed, the delegates of the different movements of the European Federation met in Brussels (The Franciscan Center of Our Lady of the Bird Song) : Wilhelm Gatzen (Vereinigung Katholischer Priester und ihrer Frauen – Germany), Ennio Bolognese (Priester ohne Amt – Austria), Mike Hyland and Joe Mulrooney (Advent – UK), Philippe Duchesne, Marie Christine and Yves Grelet (Prêtres Mariés Chemins Nouveaux – France), Franco Brescia (Vocatio – Italy), Paul Bourgeois, Pierre and Marie Astrid Collet (Hors les Murs – Belgium) and Julio P. Pinillos and Ramon Alario (MOCEOP – Spain).

It would be wrong to be scornful of the situation or to have exaggerated expectations, but we have been appreciative of the first acts of Pope Francis. We wish to offer support to any attempt to make of our church a place of service to the poorest and a place of tolerance both within and beyond itself. However, we think that the greatest challenge lies, as always, in the formation of communities which are adult and determined to live out the radicality of the gospel.

Throughout these days we have shared our points of view and our preoccupations and analysed the situation of our groups and of the federation. We made certain plans and took on commitments. The harmony and friendship found in the meeting facilitated an intensity in the work and an ever deeper examination of the questions which give meaning to this federation.

Considering all of that, here is the detailed report.

Belgium – Hors-les-Murs

(Our group has become very small and several active members have died or are rather ill. The next AGM will take place on Sunday June 16th. 2013. We shall hear a statement from Brigitte Rigo, a member of the Dominican Order and biblical scholar, who has recently left the order “because the atmosphere had become intolerable”. The principally activity is still the quarterly bulletin brought out in collaboration with the base communities. The media often make demands on us and sometimes we reply, while taking care not to give in to the demands of journalists who look only for sensationalism. This is not always easy. We supported the editorial debut of Elisa Mignot, *Amours interdites* (Forbidden Loves). We reacted off our own bat to the debate on France 2 following the excellent television film “The silence of the Churches” on paedophilia, calling Isabelle de Gaulmyn back to her duty to provide information which was a little more professional. There was no reply.

Our action for justice vis a vis the retirement pension of priests widows is ongoing. The judgement has been put back for the fourth time to June 17th. 2013 - “a good sign”, according to Paul Bourgeois. The new “*Cellule d'ecoute des compagnons de pretres*” (A group offering a listening ear to the partners of priests) exists and is ready to function. Through the good graces of ‘Plein Jour

France' we received a call to help a 'partner' who lives in Belgium. The support is in hand and also the resignation of her partner.

Pierre and Marie Astrid Collet went to represent the Federation in supporting Jose Antonio Fernandez at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. Hors-les-Murs took responsibility for their travel expenses.

Vocatio – Italy

We have difficulty in meeting at a national level. However, there are many opportunities to meet some of the members of Vocation and to share in one of their reunions. We shared with the base communities and other groups (Noi siamo chiesa – We are Church,) in commemorating the 50th anniversary of Vatican II and *Pacem in Terris* and in the preparations for the celebration of the close of the council. We have had a series of meetings around the themes of the conciliar documents – also many film sessions with films which touch upon these topics. We have equally tackled the question of the presence of women at the council in their capacity as auditors – 23 women, religious and lay, were present. In most cases nobody has mentioned them. Nobody remembers them especially in the official commemorations. This reflection has been led by Adriane Valerio, theologian and historian, who has treated the topic in a book 'Madri del Concilio' (Council Mothers). You can read a report at www.paves-reseau.be/revue.php?id=1182. It is underlined that there were three questions personally ruled out by Paul VI: the ordination of women, contraception and the celibacy of the clergy.

Vocatio wishes to maintain contacts with organisations which have come into being and find their position in the perspectives of the council, while keeping in mind the advanced age of its members.

MOCEOP – Spain

The group maintains contact with some 300 members and with a group of around 50 militants very involved in the dynamics of groups and the dynamics of the national group. 1000 copies of the review '*Tiempo de Actuar*' (Time to Act) are published four times a year, of which about 200 are sent to Latin America. In 2012 we published two numbers of the review on Vatican II: the starting point was the memory of the experiences of the members of MOCEOP in order to construct on this base an analysis of the actual experiences of the council and an analysis of its great pastoral trajectories.

A high percentage of the members of MOCEOP are participants in grass root movements: Les Comunidades Cristianas Populares, Iglesia de Base, Somos Iglesia, different local or regional fora. In so far as we are a global movement we are part of the Redes Cristianas network. In the majority of cases we combine with the general base communities. In very particular cases there are parishes where a team of priests or a pastoral council have taken aboard the presence of a married priest in their midst. However, the majority opt for commitments in lay associations.

Throughout the year we are present at a number of reunions, meetings of the movement or more open meetings such as theological congresses e.g. Madrid or Andalusia; an open meeting at Albacete to prepare the editions of *Tiempo de Hablar*; a meeting to celebrate Holy Week (Pinas de Horadada); different celebrations of the Eucharist (Christmas). Every two years we are present at a national meeting of *Redes Cristianas* – this year it will be at Saint Jacques de Compostella. Every three years we hold a general assembly. This year we meet at las lagunas de Rudiera, a spot that is a little paradise, in order to reflect upon the challenges posed by the changes in the new world in which we live in the light of the gospel and the intuitions of Vatican II – “Remain connected to the future. A new world arrives”. The production will be handled in an atmosphere of celebration, of visual exhibition (theatre) and of festivities.

MOCEOP'S main lines of work are: to strengthen daily commitments, to make actual and real the principal faith stances – spirituality, commitment evangelisation; to integrate into groups working for the renewal of society and the church; to try and formulate in the language of today our convictions as believers; to develop a common sense theology which distances itself from the jargon of scholastic theology.

The editions of *Tiempo de Hablar* for 2013 are: 1. Social movements 2. Christianities – a church in all its diversity 3. Documents from the general assembly 4. What Catechism? The catechism of life.

We try to be present in society through press communications on topical events.

Priester Ohne Amt – Austria

The Austrian group has had no significant changes. Though, when there are monthly meetings, the group has grown from 12-15 to 20-25. The required larger meeting room has been found in a parish. Meetings begin with a concelebrated Mass: The homily is shared – it is the reflections of the group. There is an important sensitivity concerning the way in which biblical texts are linked to the mentality of the people of today. We share the preoccupations which issue from different topical news items. We finish with a shared meal.

There exists in Austria a vast movement which demands reform of the Catholic Church as one can see in following the initiatives represented by ‘Wir sind kirche’ and the ‘Pfarrer-initiative’. The movement of married priests has been and remains present to and close to this movement.

We have equally been preoccupied by the situation in two dioceses which are actually without a bishop. We wait with interest to see if the choice for these dioceses will take into account the suggestions made by the communities.

We keep contact with movements in other countries as in the case of ‘Teoforum’ in Bratislava. We have also tried to establish relations with the married priests in Poland.

Vereinigung Katholischer Priester und Ihrer Frauen – Germany

The movement brings together some 180 members, of whom 40 took part in the last general assembly. We participated in a debate concerning three couples of married priests: Also a debate about the virginal conception of Jesus. These subjects and others are open questions and preoccupy public opinion. What is missing is a statement from the hierarchy which would serve as a guide for actual reflection but without closing the doors to investigation and research.

We have been informed of the publication of a book by Vogels on celibacy as gift and as law. However, on the author's web site it is said to be the third edition of his 1978 and 1992 book.

http://www.hjvogels.de/htm/zoelibat_eine_gabe_kein_gesetz_htm

Advent – UK

Advent is basically now a web site. A group of three or four meet socially each month on the basis of friendship. It is a long time since we had new members and rarely now are we contacted by the media. It was proposed that the two representatives present would take their expenses and hand over the residue of 500 euros to the federation.

In the United Kingdom there is now a movement called "A Call to Action (ACTA)". In June 2012 a letter appeared in the 'Tablet' signed by seven priests. It was an invitation to priests and deacons in active service to help the bishops promote the participation of the laity in dialogue.

A meeting was held in Saint John's Anglican Church, London, with about 70 to 100 participants on 18th July 2012. The aim that was developed was to establish fora where people would feel free to talk, where they could find a voice and where they would have the confidence that they would be listened to. It was not clear whether they would be a group focussing on issues and, if so, what. In a way it was a closed meeting and an open follow up meeting was arranged. This took place in October at Heythrop College at the beginning of the year of faith and the 50th anniversary of the opening of Vatican II. In all there were about 350 to 400 participants.

Outcomes: A web site: A Call to Action UK. /Google group which is opening up discussions. /Local meetings in many dioceses.

It is still early days – Is it still too clerical? Has a plan of action emerged? Are the bishops interested? Is it still too hierarchical? A core group has been established but 'How?' Watch this space.

The Archdiocese of Westminster has reinstated fish on a Friday and plenary indulgences for the year of faith. What is that about?

Prêtres Mariés – Chemins Nouveaux – France

We are aware that there is little contact between the Northern French Group and the group around Marseilles.

The latter has devoted its attentions to two important questions which have stirred up interest: On the one hand the claims of priests' partners (Plein Jour) and on the other the vast world of unrecognised children of priests. These two lines of work are open to groups of married priests and other grass roots movements in the church.

The Northern Group admits to being few in number. It concentrates on the publication of its bulletin '*Chemins Nouveaux*', consisting principally of witnesses to another way of living and sharing faith in Jesus of Nazareth. They have equally been very taken up by the demand for a back pension for the widow of a married priest, after having obtained the yielding up of the rules in the matter.

Social and Economic Situation

Paul presented a work of synthesis of the data supplied by the different countries in response to questionnaires drawn up by the group. In examining the work we observed that there was lacking certain data provided previously by the different countries.

We thanked Paul for the work and encouraged him to correct and complete it with elements received. Each group delegate was invited to verify and complete the work on the basis of this table. The following stage which Paul will undertake is to arrive at a redaction for each country which ought then to be corrected and put on the web site.

It is only afterwards that we can consider an action at the European Council. In this process the federation is represented by the 'Reseau Europeen Eglises et Libertes' of which we are associate members. This network awaits our final document in order to present it.

However, Paul suggests that we use it on the whole as a grid for analysis and reflection on work already existing on the comparison of social security regimes of the countries of the EU. We also suggest that the final document includes, by way of introduction, the general situation of the Catholic Church which has not signed up to the universal Declaration of Human Rights, placing itself at the international juridical level underneath and out of range of the respect for and application of these rights.

The tasks to which we are committed.

- Paul Bourgeois: Complete and correct the document on the social and economic situation.
- Other participants: Complete and verify the data which is missing and send that to Paul.

An original publication for 2015

We are directing ourselves towards a formula 'after the manner of Lobinger's book'. That is to say we would describe in a first section a very varied series of actual experiences; the second part would consist in drawing out the consequences of this actuality and producing a global reflection for the future.

We all felt that a good method would consist in setting out from the reality as that exists in our communities, to be able to analyse and compare theologically the situation and needs which these communities experience. We do not claim to respond to the situations and needs of all the Christian communities on the surface of the earth but to respond to those which can be represented by what we would call a grass roots church. The pluralism of the communities seems to us to be a very important theological datum. We must start out, as Lobinger, did from an established fact which will in future become universally accepted: Parishes do not supply all the necessary forms and needs of the community.

We list a series of experiences which could be made the object of presentations(from 5 to 10 pages maximum).

Base communities (Different forms, without doubt).

The independent communities of the Netherlands (Following 'Church and Ministry' of the Dominicans.

The 300 local communities of Poitiers.

The summons of the 'Pfarrer-Initiative'.

Worker Priests.

The importation of foreign priests, Polish/African, and the question of inculturation.

The growing presence of women priests in the UK.

The experience of Catholic women priests, especially in the USA.

The perspective of theology produced by women (cf. www.eswtr.org)

The coexistence of two clergies, married and celibate, the ex-Anglicans and the United Oriental Churches.

A sociology of young clergy.

Etc.

In a second part we ought to draw up a 'global interpretation' of all of that, *our* interpretation evidently, but well based on the reality of our research among believers. One would try to show that these are the theological themes that take on another dimension, another colour: The community and its ministers, democracy and participation, collegiality and subsidiarity, humanism and the image of God, spiritualities which are diverse and adapted to circumstances, etc. One could imagine a series of more 'personal' appendices or more personal ways of tackling certain themes. For example, we listen with great interest to the text of Joe Mulrooney '*What kind of priest do we want?*' which he will send us immediately. The final objective will be to publish a book in 3/5 languages (English, French, Italian, French, German and Spanish: the question remains to be decided). The experiences would be published in the original languages but accompanied by a little summary in English, Spanish and French.

The tasks to which we are committed

Pierre Collet and Joe Mulrooney have accepted to pilot the project in its first stage.

Before October 1st discussions in national groups and choice of experiences to present (Part I)

Select two experiences for each country. Before 1st. April 2014 first edition of these experiences and dispatch to everyone for advice and discussion.

A grand reunion of the Federation or Confederation in 2015.

The question had been raised last year and Julio Pinillo insists on the interest that there would be in relaunching in a certain fashion the dynamism of the international meetings. He suggests two axes:

(a) that of the development of the problem, taking inspiration from the themes tackled by each international congress from 1983 to 2005 and then by each federation from 2005 to 2015. (b) That of a reflection on “What are the socio-ecclesial realities in which we participate?” which could be the subject of a document.

We welcome also very favourably the contribution of Mario Mullo, till recently the president of the Latin American Federation. He insists in his letter on the need to revitalise the life of the federations and to give some substance to the International Confederation; all of that along the lines of the ideas of Vatican II. In order to prepare for this international meeting he suggests that we use the method of JOC: *See* (analyse who and what are today’s movements), *judge* (Compare the reality with the gospel and with the documents of Vatican II), and *act* (Return to the concrete demands that the two previous stages have indicated). We grasp from Julio’s first axis (a) that it is a good reminder and a good point of departure in order to motivate us to continue this evolution. One would connect, without doubt, with the analysis that we have foreseen for our publication. Likewise, does not the second axis (b) concerning the actual realities treat equally the ‘different experiences ‘ that we would like to give pride of place in our publication. In any case it seems to us that from a thematic point of view it would be good to make the connection between our publication and the reunion.

We recall also that, even more than the reunion itself, it is all of the preparation which is interesting and we meet again the crossover with the work of preparing an original publication. It is a question of motivating our groups conjointly for both tasks.

What appears to be most interesting is the comparison and mutual enrichment of the approaches of the Latin American and European Federations. While paying close attention to the task of balancing as much as possible the contributions it must not happen that everything is decided by the Europeans...without doubt easier to say than to do.

Julio Pinillos and Ramon Alario are our natural links with the Latin American Federation and the revue ‘Tiempo di Hablar’, moreover has regular reports devoted to it. The Latin American Federation declared itself as no longer forming part of the Confederation; in becoming the ‘International Federation for a renewed Catholic Ministry’ it not only proclaimed itself as international but continued to place the focus on questions of ministry rather than community. We do not have much information on the Philippine Federation. Mike Hyland takes responsibility for renewing the contacts. There is a severe lack of information concerning Africa – not the Africans who are in Europe but the married priests in Africa - no doubt because they do not have any structures. Marie Christine and Yves Grelet are going to try to focus on that and find contacts to make progress.

The question of the practical realisation of this reunion poses questions. Is not the project of a special reunion of the Confederation as it was envisaged in 2005 a little illusory? Would we succeed in bringing together so many people for this type of meeting. Moreover, the last experience at Wiesbaden was not very encouraging? From another point of view, since the joint organisation of the Congress of Leganes, an openness and a collaboration of our groups of married priests (and the base communities) shows itself to be more and more with the larger networks. The year 2015 being the year of the celebration of the closure of Vatican II, there will be plenty more organised gatherings on this occasion of which that headed by council 50(with, in addition to others, the groups IMWAC and the Reseau Europeen Eglises et Libertes). Is it reasonable to organise in parallel our own congress or ought we rather to enter into contact and dialogue and arrive at a compromise with Council 50 in order to find our own specific place in the organisation of their activity? In order not to put in competition the participation at our meeting and that of

Council 50, above all for travellers who come from very far away, we are rather tending in this direction but with prudence.

The tasks to which we commit ourselves

Communicate this work plan to our groups in order to begin the preparations of the relevant material.

We unfortunately did not designate anyone to conduct this investigation vis a vis the leaders of Council 50. Perhaps the best positioned for that would be an Italian delegate (because that will be organised in Rome by Vittorio BellaVite) or an Austrian delegate (because IMWAC are now led by Martha Heizer of Innsbruck). If not, by default, Pierre Collet will have to make the first contacts. In any case we think that from a thematic point of view it would be good to make the connections between our publication and this meeting.

Mike Hyland: contacts with the Philippines.

Yves Grelet: Contacts with Africans in Africa.

Julio Pinillo and Ramon Alario: contacts with Latin America.

Joe Mulrooney will send us his text 'What kind of priest do we want?'

Contacts – Communication

We have had occasion to call to mind the existence of other groups of married priests or groups whose objectives are close to ours. We wish to put a priority on making contacts or attempting to renew contacts. For example Italy: the group of married priests of Emilia-Romagna, a group of married worker priests, the group with Stephania Salomone 'Donne così'. Francia Brescia is going to try a new approach to the group of Emilia-Romagna, perhaps even for the 2014 meeting. In France: 'La Boivre' and 'Plein Jour' – one would like to see Jean and Dominique taking a place in the federation to represent the feelings of 'Plein Jour'.

In any case we think it is important to send communications to these groups or to communicate with these groups – including the Dutch, Flemish and Swiss and others we do not know – each time that we do something.

The tasks to which we are committed

- To try and establish contacts with other countries or continents where no federation exists.

Open Letter to the Bishop of Rome

We thought it opportune to publicly send a letter to the new Pope in view of the new and encouraging style that he seems to offer. We did not think that a list of demands was the best form of communication with which to find an echo. On the contrary we ought rather to concentrate our proposal on a grand idea.

Following the proposal of Joe Mulrooney we put at the centre the themes of joy and hope in a reference to Genesis 1:31: "that it was *very good*".

The tasks to which we are committed

-Joe Mulrooney made a proposal for the open letter to Francis, bishop of Rome. He will send us a draft text.

-Read Joe's letter and offer suggestions for the final edition.

Opening a bank account and Finances

As agreed already last year we reaffirm the necessity of opening a bank account in the name of the association. We decided to establish it in Belgium because there we were not required to register the association at the legal level (Statutes, Prefecture etc). However, it required an address: We chose that of the registered offices of the Belgian group 'Hors les Murs' - Rue de Budinne 6, B-4217 HERON.

The bank account will be a simple savings account which totally avoids administration fees. It must from now on be linked to a personal current account to be able to carry out the necessary transactions, that of Paul Bourgeois, who will in future take on the role of accountant.

The question of the nationality of the trustees: It would be good if Jean Combes could be one but for that he would be required to present himself to a Belgian office of the designated bank. In any case, even if he were not a trustee, we are asking him to remain as treasurer. He would be able to receive statements electronically. Three trustees, at least, must be designated: Paul Bourgeois, Marie-Astrid Lombard and Jean-Loup Robaux (If Jean Combe cannot take on that function).

The 2012 accounts have been agreed. The groups from France, Italy, Austria and Spain pay their fifty Euros contributions in cash. Spain paid 50 euros extra for a late 2012 contribution. Belgium has already paid in advance. The UK group made a cash gift of 500 Euros, the balance from the closure of the Advent account – Thank you! There is a total of 750 Euros, which Pierre Collet has and which will be deposited when the account is opened. The budget for 2015 will have to take the projects into account; The publication and an international meeting (and then help with travel expenses). That is to be looked at in our 2014 meeting.

Tasks to which we are committed

Paul Bourgeois: opening of a savings account at the post office bank, signatures.

Administration

The team (Pierre Collet, Ramon Alario and Jean Combes) remains in place.

The web site is healthy but must be brought up to date (French Group). We are asking for assistance with information, especially bibliographies and also translations (at least titles and summaries).

Ramon Alario and Pierre Collet.