



Movement of Christian Workers

REVIEW

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Lent – A Season of Challenge

The season of Lent is often associated with denial of perhaps certain food or drink. And whilst this is sometimes a good thing to do, there is a danger that it can be perceived in a negative fashion. It is not always clear why these things are being done and sometimes there can be a feeling that it is all just out of habit.

As members of MCW we often see opportunities where others might see problems. We tend to be adept at identifying how we can make a positive difference or change in particular circumstances be that in our family lives, places of work parishes or communities.

Sadly we see all around us many examples of the negative. Unemployment, underemployment and cuts to public expenditure much of which will hit the poor and disadvantaged disproportionately hard.

In contrast, seeing and experiencing Lent in our positive way enables us to take a fresh look at the challenges

in our lives. The Review of Life really does give us a new view of the situations we face. It also assists us to identify signs of hope and concrete actions to make a positive difference.

Our method, See, Judge and Act and the unique way in which we use it to construct our Reviews of Life is an indispensable tool which enables lifelong engagement. Let's hope that during this Lenten Season we are able to redouble our efforts to be faithful to our method and take leadership roles to make a real difference.

In this edition we have included a report from Ann Smith who was one of our delegates at the European Conference which took place in Bratislava. There is also a précis of some reflections which Jim Dearlove gave at the National Conference. We are also reminding everyone that our next Newsletter will be a bumper International edition. It will be accompanied by our annual appeal which this year is to raise money to enable those Movements from the South to attend the International Council of the World Movement of Christian Workers taking place in Germany in July 2013.

Report from the 2012 European Seminar, Bratislava, by Ann Smith Theme of the seminar: 'Social Security in Europe'

Bratislava is the capital of Slovakia, a country with a population of five million. The river Danube runs through the city. On one bank of the river is a complex of flats, housing one hundred and fifty thousand people-which is the highest density of population in Europe. (These flats were built during the soviet era)

The seminar was a continuation of the previous one held in England in 2011 on the theme of social security in Europe especially in the light of the recession affecting all parts of Europe. There were two delegates from England, Ann Smith a new MCW delegate to European Conferences and Jim Dearlove a seasoned campaigner of such events. They were joined by David McLoughlin who was there specifically for a group focusing on the spirituality of the Movement and how it is understood and practiced by different Movements in different countries.



Forty delegates representing 14 Movements from across Europe met over a 4 day period to discuss how more sustainable social policies could be remodelled. It gave the opportunity to share the realities of workers in the different countries whilst revealing the negative impact of austerity measures particularly on the most vulnerable. Movement after Movement reported pessimism, disengagement, depression and despair. However, they and their individual members were as involved as they could be in campaigning, marching to show their anger and concern as well as working with other organisations to take action where possible. The Spanish spoke of home repossessions as a huge issue and were involved with others to try to stop them where they could. The Germans had been involved in the mass protests about the economic cuts and the threats to pensions. Those from the Czech Republic had arranged a seminar to examine the economic situation and how to find solutions. The Portuguese spoke of unemployment and underemployment and how this was



effecting the large immigrant population who had no right to any state benefit. The English delegation also spoke of unemployment, the change in benefits taking place, the privatisation of public services and as with other countries, the impact on the poorest and most vulnerable.

An economist gave a presentation about the causes and consequences of the financial crisis in Europe. His view was that the austerity programmes must stop. Petitions, demonstrations, campaigns, public information and other actions were not superfluous! Saving money results in less spending so consumption decreases, lower wages leads to the reluctance to buy, consequently sales decrease as does the utilisation of the capacity of the economy and less workers are hired. The idea for budgetary pacts was not bad in itself but it should be humane and dignified. Regulating the financial markets was a necessity as was a sustainable banking system which would involve separating credit banks from investment banks.

European Seminar Report continued:

Other elements at the conference were visits to local projects. There was one to a centre for the homeless, a social café and some sheltered workshops. A business session debated the on-going organisation and financial structures of the European Movement of Christian Workers. In addition there was the 'Table of Europe'. This meant that every Movement brought and shared food and drink and sung songs from the countries they represented which resulted in a very lively social evening.

Spiritual Companions of European Christian Worker Movements

Five priests and four laity met in Bratislava in October to discuss the spirituality of the Movements, how it is encompassed, who forms the laity (the Spanish refer to animators of faith) and what approach is taken to achieve this. It was recognised that one of the differences within our Movements is the 'space' given to the Review of Life. However, all have a desire for spiritual guidance of good quality.

All shared to various degrees a concern about the relationship with local churches as there seemed to be little recognition of the Movements whilst there were expectations of Movements in relation to the local churches.

The group reaffirmed that our Movements are the Church in the working world and the importance of investing in the formation of the laity for this role was essential, "in this Church the laity must take their place". There was a need for a sharing of experiences in the formation of the laity which could, via the European Chaplain, be passed on to other Movements so that we all gain in ideas and initiatives.

The General Assembly of the World Movement of Christian Workers, July 2013, will give a further opportunity for this group to continue to reflect on the question of spiritual guidance. Meeting at the International Council provides the opportunity for the thoughts and views of laity and priests from other Continents to also be embraced.

MCW National Conference 2012 Mission of the Movement Today

Jim Dearlove led the discussion on the Mission of the Movement today. He began by tracing the development of the MCW and giving a broad brush account of the major shifts in the socio-economic and political backdrop in our country during the time of the Movement's development. A similar approach was addressed to the changing landscape of the Catholic Church.



The MCW clearly relates back to the Young Christian Workers (YCW) and the adult organisation, Family & Social Action (FSA). The FSA's specific service which focused on issues around work and workers gave rise to the development of the MCW. As with the YCW and the Cardijn Association the MCW remains faithful to the Cardijn tradition.

The need to trace the politics and economics on the one hand and the changes in the Church on the other reflects the nature and preoccupation of the MCW as it supports and sustains activists in building the Kingdom.

Jim's overview covered the period from 1945 through to the period known as Neo-Liberalism with the rolling back of

the state up to the Banking Crisis and the resultant Austerity Britain as it is termed. The impact of these various eras on the realities of men and women's lives was also acknowledged. The changing stages in the Church were characterised as Pre-Vatican II, Vatican II itself and what Jim referred to as currently, a possible Post-Vatican period.

Two particular themes within this presentation were a return to the literal reading of documents and the need to differentiate between principles and values.

For those who lived through and benefited from Vatican II in our Movements felt that it ordained their role. It was a dynamic process and not a fixed event. Sadly in Jim's view the latter was now the perspective of many in the official Church. The dynamism of the time had been reduced to just a particular fixed event in time. The 'Spirit' of Vatican II meant not being limited to literal reading of its documents but still faithful to the 'Spirit'. To support this view Jim shared a phrase from St Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians "The letter kills but the spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6).

This fixed literal reading gave rise to the second issue that of separating values from principles. Principles were described as tending towards generalisations accepted as truths. They had a propensity to also be static

and literal. Values on the other hand were more inclined to be beliefs in which there is an emotional investment thus making them more dynamic and more suited to activism and its support and sustenance. Reading, trying to understand and identifying the values of Jesus' life can help us more clearly to ask "who is the orphan, the widow, the stranger today and what is my responsibility to them?"

The discussion that then took place emphasised the MCW as still a Movement of the Church. To be faithful to the method necessitated looking for the values we should live by and looking for the signs of hope in a realistic way. It was essential to develop leadership now more than ever and to help sustain hope in the face of adversity. It was felt that the Movements are not necessarily the best at disseminating their knowledge and practice. For those in groups the possibility of reviewing their lives and following enquiries had a great impact. This both sustained but also challenged members so that they could be more effective in making a difference.

In that Spirit it is possible to see that at the moment we are swimming against the tide in political, economic and church terms. However, we still need to articulate the mission of the Movement to form, support and sustain Christian Worker Leaders and activists whatever their involvement, wherever they are.

International Seminar and General Assembly, Germany, July 2013

The theme is: **Let's Build a Just, Fraternal & Sustainable Society**

During May / June we will be issuing a special International MCW Review along with an appeal to help us pay for delegates from the South to attend this international gathering of Adult Christian Workers from every Continent.

The views expressed by contributors to MCW Review do not necessarily represent the views of the MCW

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