



WSCF-E Conference and Regional Assembly
Gender, Religion and Society
Sambata de Sus, Romania
6-13 October 2009



Forty students from throughout Europe gathered in the Brancoveanu Monastery amidst the Carpathian mountains in Sambata de Sus, Romania, for the thematic conference “Gender, Religion and Society”, 6-10 October, and the 11th European Regional Assembly, 11-13 October.

Rosie Venner and Torbjorn Askevold led interactive icebreakers to help foster the conference community on the first morning. Jaanus Teose, the gender coordinator, gave an overview of the topic and schedule of the week. Alessia Passarelli, the out-going chair, introduced the statutory work.

Gender Perspectives

Father Constantine Nicula, an Orthodox priest and theology professor, and Alina Patru, a theologian and member of the CEC Central Committee, both from Sibiu, gave an introduction to gender in the local context and in the Orthodox church in Romania. Father Nikolai began by explaining, “I am a man, but I also give birth to children in the church. This means I also have a feminine dimension...” He proceeded to explain that the human being is not only biological, but also ecclesial. The Sacrament of Marriage, is not only between the couple present, but is also important for the community as a whole.

Alina Patru continued to explain about gender in the Orthodox tradition. While women can study theology and become professors, they cannot become priests. In Romania, under Communism gender equality was forcefully standardised, and because of this many people today are wary of other efforts for equality. A question and answer session on views of gender and sexuality in the local context followed.

Maryann Philbrook, the Communications Intern at the Interregional Office of WSCF in Geneva, led an interactive workshop of Gender and Human rights. Using the format of an “Intercultural Coffeeshop”, participants divided into groups to discuss questions about gender equality and student life.



Rosie Venner and Jenny Morgans, both from the UK, led a workshop on “Gender and the Media”. Participants were instructed to go through magazine clips and to reflect in pairs on the portrayal of gender as seen in the images and headlines. All then created a collage of the images.

Jaanus facilitated a panel discussion about sexuality and identity in different denominations with participant panelists: Jaso Pössi, an Orthodox from Finland; Jenny Morgans, an Anglican from the UK; Erikka Chapman, a Protestant from Sweden; and John Delap, a Catholic from Ireland/USA. The questions included: How does your denomination view sexuality? What are the particular challenges of sexuality for your denomination?

In addition, Erikka Chapman, from Sweden, led a workshop on master suppression techniques, examining ways in which groups suppress the voice of individuals and giving examples of counter actions. She used theater and other interactive methods to reflect on the theme. Tanja Roiha, from Finland, led a theater workshop examining gender roles through interactive role-playing exercises.

Theologies of Gender

Yusra Khreegi, a PhD student from the UK, led a session on Gender and Islam. Rather than looking at the way various Islamic groups interpret gender through additional laws, she led a basic overview of passages in the Quran related to gender. A time of question and answers followed.

Gyrid Gunnes, a Lutheran pastor from Norway, gave a lecture and led a discussion on theologies of gender. She explained two basic models of views on gender roles, which are both used within different denominations and other institutions. The first model merges Hebrew religion and culture with Greek cultural traditions, perceiving gender as



something given (by God). Gender is thus stable throughout time and space. This model also applies to sexuality and finds a gender hierarchy to be natural. The second model grew out of the civil rights movement and developments of recent centuries. In this model independence and a common humanity is emphasised, thus there is no room for a hierarchy. In discussions, all examined their own religious and societal backgrounds in reflection on the two models proposed. Many found their backgrounds to combine a mixture of the two. Discussion on gender roles in the church continued from this lecture in a workshop led by John Delap and Gyrid Gunnes.

Fulata Moyo, from Malawi, working for the World Council of Churches in Geneva, prepared a bible study entitled “Gender, Sexuality and the Bible” on Judges 19. She could not attend the conference because she was denied a visa. As a result, James Grant, a seminary student from the UK, and Joa Vuorinen, the Regional Secretary from Finland, led her contextual bible study dealing with sexual violence.

Welcoming all to the “Solidarity in Action” session, Vera Papp gave everyone a Bindi welcome blessing before beginning a lecture on her recent trip to India. She explained about the great need she saw, including information on gender violence in India, and about the volunteer work she did. In the following discussions, all examined the call to solidarity and opportunities for solidarity actions within our local communities.

European Regional Assembly

The European Regional Assembly took place from 11-13 October, following the thematic conference. The outgoing ERC gave reports on their work for the past two years before answering questions. Alessia Passarelli, the outgoing chair, and Joa Vuorinen, the regional secretary, led a brainstorming session examining SCM and student participation. Rachael Weber, the Lingua Franca coordinator, also distributed questions for feedback about the future of and plans for the Lingua Franca programme.

In Policy Paper working groups, participants divided into groups based on the working areas of WSCF-E – theology, gender, solidarity, culture and higher education, and links – to create a draft for the policy paper. This draft was then compiled and gone over as an entire group in the statutory sessions. The Policy Paper will direct the work of the European Region for the next two years.

A new ERC was also elected: Maximilian Karrasch (Germany) as Culture and Higher Education Coordinator, Vaida Krisciunaite (Lithuania) as Solidarity Coordinator, Sofie Eriksen (Denmark) as Theology Coordinator, Joseph Nagle (UK) as Gender Coordinator and Katarina Babicova (Slovakia) as Links Coordinator. WSCF-E is very grateful to the previous ERC for their hard work and commitment and is also excited to continue with the new!



In Community

On the Intercultural evening, complete with a buffet, all shared skits, traditional songs, stories and dances. During the Movement Market, each representative explained briefly about the work of their SCMs. On the Mystical evening, participants presented stories, poetry, and sayings from various traditions in the cozy balcony above the conference room. *Urga*, a Russian film about a family living on the Mongolian steppe, was shown on the movie evening.

On the excursion day, all went into Sibiu, first to a museum showing early Romanian village life and then to the Sibiu centre. Singing filled most of the bus ride back to the venue.

All week, participants joined in morning ecumenical worships. In order to share in the traditions of all at the conference, everyone prepared evening denominational worships. The closing worship was held in the leaf-strewn autumn forest, and ended as we walked together back to the venue singing “Ubi Caritas” before the evening monastery bells chimed. After the farewell party, all left on Tuesday morning on buses to Sibiu and then back home.

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