

Friday 15<sup>th</sup> of June.

Blankenberge, 7PM. **Simon Evers** is glad to welcome the participants, mentioning that 68 people are gathered from 22 countries in Europe, USA and Australia – and reminding us that in the very first Consultation, there were 11 attendees and that it all started with two chaplains, from Sweden and Germany, who walked and talked together and came up with a good idea...

Not all the members of the **Organizing Committee** could make it to Blankenberge, but Axel Liégeois, Karoliine Nikula, Simon Haamer and Simon Evers are present. Our thoughts go especially to Father Adamantios who is severely ill. His son sent a message that he feels very connected. We ask for God's blessing for him and his family. Indeed, the ENHCC is not only a professional network, it is also a wonderful place of personal relationships and friendship.

The same **candle** that was lit the first time in London, 2010, and was then passed on to Mennorode, Salzburg and Debrecen, is now lit in Blankenberge. In the coming days, it will burn during all the general assemblies.

**A short film** learns that Belgium is the dullest country in the world – or is it rather hilarious, given its political structures? Anyway, every participant got a can of beer and some chocolate in his congress bag! Yes, this is really Belgium.

**Anne Vandenhoeck** reminds how years ago her promotor gave her the invitation for Dublin 2004: "Wouldn't you go? You might meet interesting people". It was the start of many years of intense working for the ENHCC, in different functions, and it was more than just "meeting interesting people", it was the gift of lifelong friendships. Anne appreciates how throughout the years the spirit of the first meeting was preserved: "We got to learn from each other and from each other's work".

**Another short film** shows how spiritual care in psychiatry in Belgium works with spirituality groups. One chaplain explains how such a meeting starts with the ritual of welcoming every single participant by name, a ritual they very much appreciate. These groups are a means of connecting people with each other and with their most inner self. The strength of these groups is also in leaving the logic of efficiency behind. People can simply be their very self. These groups exchange about a theme that inspires them, in a way that they are given a safe space.

"We organised the consultation, but you will make it!", says **Axel Liégeois**. He explains that the focus of this Consultation is not on what we do as chaplains, but on who we are – our motives, our attitudes, our experiences, our spirituality. This is symbolized in the image of a tree with its roots, fruits and its environment. This image is not new, see Matthew 7, 15-20: "By their fruit you will recognize them". As a chaplain you have to produce fruits of good quality, that is what patients and organisations expect from you. Therefore you need favourable circumstances – a tree grows better in a good environment. But a tree to really live well needs healthy roots. This is our spirituality, hidden within each of us. invisible, but therefore not less important, on the contrary. In the logo of this consultation, the roots are made visible, on purpose, for we will talk about this element in particular.

**A short film** presenting Bruges is very promising for the tourist visit on Sunday!

**Bert Verbeke**, chair of the Flemish Association of Chaplains, explains that one of the primary goals of the Association is to find official recognition for this profession, through contacts with both politicians and leading church people. Since one year, the Association has a new logo depicting an open hand that symbolizes support, openness to other people and to the world, God's hand or the hand of Jesus determined to reach to others, just like chaplains try to do. The design also reminds of a flame, like fire.

Bert witnesses of his work as a chaplain in an institution for disabled children, which for him is a source of spirituality: how to meet vulnerability? In workshops these children have made small clay trees – the logo of this Consultation –, one for each participant. They were very happy and proud to make these, and so is Bert. It is the result of talking about spirituality and thinking about what it means to have a crack in your lifeline.

**Simon Evers** already senses the spirit of the Consultation, and so do we! The practical aspects of the meeting are explained – nice surprise: morning prayer on Saturday will be held on the beach, just across the street – and every attendee is warmly invited and encouraged to be active on Twitter via **#ENHCC2018 !!**

Input from the small discussion groups will be passed to **Ewan Kelly**, who has been confided the challenging task to first reflect on this input in the general assemblies from his theological background and his experience as a chaplain and in the ENHCC, and then synthesize it in a final statement.

The coming days, the focus throughout is on this one question:

**What is important for nurturing YOUR OWN spirituality in your work?**

After a drink and a playful way of getting acquainted – the rules of the game seemed terribly complicated but it worked out wonderfully well – the 15<sup>th</sup> Consultation is on. May it be fruitful!